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LOVE STORY

I'm big on judging books by their covers. What's the point of having a cover if it's not to form a brief opinion on what's inside? If you don't think judging a book by how others have chosen to decide to portray it—why have a cover in the first place? I don't know if it's a learned behaviour that I (we) don't do this with people. Maybe it's because I (we) know people are not books. Not products to make an instant choice over but sentient beings I (we) can choose to interact with or not regardless of how they look. That is what (we) think, right?

Anyway, I got to talking with somebody a while back and during our conversation, I happened to mention that I liked Taylor Swift. While that's probably not the first thing you would expect to come out of my mouth, it's a solid truth. She's the real deal. She also went up the ladder 50 rungs for me when she pulled all of her music from digital streaming services and told them they couldn't have her music at the royalty rate they were offering.

Fact: she is worth more than that. There are lessons to be learned here.

The next phase of the conversation was my 'revelation' that I really wasn't super keen on 'new school' tattoos. I can dissect them and appreciate good work, of course I can, but I don't 'like' them as part of the art form. For some reason, this appeared to be more offensive than the Taylor Swift admission because surely I should 'like everything about tattooing'.

I can see how it might be tempting to think that way but that's not really how things work in life. There are plenty of writers on hand who do appreciate what it has to offer and on those grounds, it passes by my desk very quickly to somebody who can treat it with the respect it deserves.

When you point at everything, you point at nothing (sorry if I've used that phrase before but it's unbelievably true), but it's a sad truth about life that when you announce you have an 'interest in tattoos', a sweeping thought pattern is made in which you must automati-



CAROLA DECASA



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IN TATTOOING, IT'S REALLY NOT A GREAT IDEA TO JUDGE THAT BOOK BY ITS COVER

cally like everything about it. Every single little thing without exclusion.

That's what people do, because most people can't be bothered to think for more than five seconds about what they're thinking about.

In tattooing, it's really not a great idea to judge that book by its cover. Not even a tiny bit because tattooed people are definitely not books, but there are an awful lot of people out there who can't seem to tell the difference.

Some advice. If ever you find yourself in the position of being painted into a corner out there in the world, rock slowly from side to side and begin your mantra:

"We were both young when I first saw you..."

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20 SCARE STORIES

In The Land of the Rising Sun, not everything is as it seems. A place known for its rich ancient history, its cultural delicacies, and more recently for its superb standard of life, Japan also has a darker claim to fame. A secret that I was told is "very, very underground..."

24 ROAD TRIP: SALT LAKE CITY

A couple of months ago, we hit Salt Lake City to see what gems lay thousands of miles from home and what did we find? Magic.

30 NEVER SAY DIE

Tattoos have always been inextricably linked to the concept of mortality. Beccy Rimmer wanted to delve further into how... and why.

36 NEW WORLD ORDER

Surrounded by architects, designers and artists in the jewish area of Zürich, the neighbourhood where Neo opened his studio is a good reflection of his background. You would not expect Neo Tattoo to be a typical studio that welcomes walk-ins.

62 LIVING ON A PRAYER

Have you ever stopped to see what you're looking at online? It might be good for business, but is it helping or hindering the art we're all so enamoured with?

68 BEHIND THE INK

What makes a tattoo artist tick? Wayne Simmons continues his Behind The Ink series, unpacking the pieces that make up some of his favourite

tattooists working today, looking in particular at the non-tattoo art that inspires them. This month, he's talking to Cathy Sue and Andy Walker, who work mostly with new school.

80 JAPAN INC.

Because being tattooed by Japanese artist Horishin wasn't cool enough, we also handed Barbara Pavone the chance to do her first interview in a foreign language.

86 GREAT BRITISH TATTOO SHOW

London is always a hotbed of activity when it comes to expecting the unexpected. More than any of our other shows, The Great British Tattoo Show always turfs up the unexpected and this year was certainly no exception.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

08 SLEEVE NOTES
94 TIME MACHINE
96 AN EYE IS UPON YOU
98 WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

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THE WORLD RECORD BREAKING TATTOO CONVENTION

Tattoo Artists so far...

Adam Blakey
 Adam Burt
 Adam Petr
 Aidan O'Brien
 AJ Curzon-Berners
 AJ Richards
 Alan Turner
 Alice Perrin
 Alex Rowntree
 Anna Plummer
 Aron Cowles
 Ashley Goldfinch
 Atom
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 Hannah Ruth Kellert
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 Jack Midz
 Jack Pepplette
 Jade Hewitson
 Jamma Dodger
 James Hobbs
 Jamie Watson
 Jase Jones
 Jay Watson
 Jeff Kohl

James Armstrong
 James Bull
 Joanne Croft
 Jordan Reay
 Jorge Becerra
 Jarn Grotwinkel
 Josh Briers
 Josh Dixon
 Josh Taylor
 Justyna Kurzelowski
 Katie Henly
 Kayley Warrington
 Key Carlin
 Kiefer Lilley
 Kevin Paul
 Laura Weller
 Lauren Hanson
 Lauren Roberts
 Lee Armstrong
 Lee Denham
 Louis Malloy
 Luca Scuro
 Luke Whitehurst
 Luke Williamson
 Maris Pavia
 Master Evo
 Matt Henning 'Henbo'
 Mayke Lady Luck Cuijvers
 Mesi Art
 Mike Maddox
 Monika Mison
 Neil Anderson
 Nick Brace
 Nick Gill
 Nick Green
 Nino Pasquarella
 Olaf's Taube
 Ollie Tye
 PJ
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 Rachel Ouston
 Raychel Maughan
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 Rich Harris
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 Rob Ratcliffe
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 Rory Craig
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 Scott Laidlaw
 Sean Sparks
 Sean Welsh
 Sebastian Poraj
 Simon Ashley
 Simon Baldwin
 Simon Broomfield
 Simon Caves
 Simon Valentine
 Simon Wainwright
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 Soozie Soo
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 Tony Mancla
 Vicky Lou
 Vincent Dexter
 Wayne Stofberg
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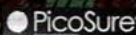
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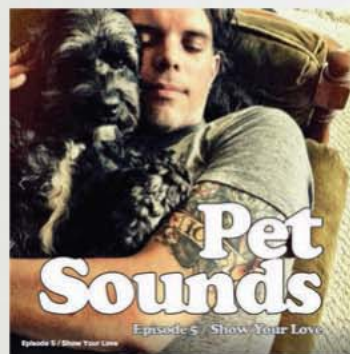
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Tattoo Great British Tattoo Show TATTOO SHOW

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Bells and Whistles Tattoo have moved studio premises from Exmouth to Exeter. You'll now find the shop located inside Gentry and Partner, a long established barber shop on Fore Street, which is a thriving specialist shopping area of independent shops. You can make contact on: bellsandwhistlesstudio.co.uk or by email at info@bellsandwhistlesstudio.co.uk. Telephone: 01392 581828



PET SOUNDS

Our dog stories last issue have sparked some serious animal love. Over in Canada, there's a podcast called Pet Sounds (and with it being a podcast it doesn't really matter that it's in Canada) and this month (episode five) the cast is all about showing your love for your pet... by getting the creature tattooed! The podcast is available here: petsoundsradio.com/episodes/five - and you can navigate your own way around the site from that link. It's cool—you know you want to. Heaven knows we've seen more than a few of them lately.



TATTOO THE TABOO

Following up on our news story from a few issues ago, Kerry Anne Richardson has updated her Tattoo The Taboo project in her quest for raising some serious money for MIND in support of mental health awareness. To donate and figure out all the workings behind the project, all you need to do is head here: justgiving.com/tattoothetaboo where you can both donate and get involved. The project also has a Facebook page for anybody needing support and you can find that here: [facebook.com/groups/1555235741402854/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1555235741402854/). Tattoo the taboo now also has an instagram page @tattoothetaboo. You know what to do...

WIN THE BIG JAM GIVEAWAY!

This is becoming quite a thing. This issue, we're giving away 15 pairs of tickets to the mighty Tattoo Jam. Back in its summer slot for the first time in three years, the days will be long and the talent list, equally as long. As we sit here typing, the artist list is still building up nicely but as we go forwards, you can expect (and will get) daily updates to that list right here: tattoojam.com/artists.

The three day show has built quite the reputation over the last few years and don't forget that on Artist Friday, there's also the Tattoo Masters' Ball featuring our 2015 Industry Awards ceremony.

To be in with a chance at getting your hands on some free swag, simply send a blank email to editor@skindeep.co.uk with the subject line of TATTOO JAM and we'll do the rest in good time for you to make arrangements for the dog.

BODY ART EXPO DUBLIN

4 JULY-5 JULY

The Helix DCU, Collins Avenue
Glasnevin, Dublin 9 IRELAND
facebook.com/bodyartexpodublin

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4 JULY-5 JULY

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tattooexpo.ro

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17 JULY-19 JULY

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Corpus Christi, TX 78401
UNITED STATES
facebook.com/Theinkmasterstattooshow

TEXAS TATTOO SHOWDOWN FESTIVAL

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Coliseum of El Paso
4100 East Paisano Drive
El Paso, TX 79905-4324 UNITED STATES
texasattooshowdownfestival.com

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WIN A MOTH! (KIND OF)

That old rogue James Robinson down at Gilded Cage in Brighton has come up with a pretty neat offer for us here. This hawk moth - cast from a real taxidermied hawk moth - is one of a kind, never to be repeated design and it can be yours. It's construction is 99.9 percent silver on snake chain, it's skull is embellished with two real dark blue sapphires and oxidised. James tells us it can be worn as necklace or a bow tie, or he can make it into a ring if you so wish. To be honest, we'd love to see it used as a bowtie, so if you become The Chosen One, do us a favour somewhere along the

line and send in a pic of such a use.

To appear in the magical hat, send a blank email to editor@skindeep.co.uk with the subject line HAWK MOTH and let's get this beauty around a welcoming neck.

As always, if you don't feel very lucky at all, you can simply buy some swag or at least check it out along with some great tattoos at gildedcagetattooosudio.com or, if you're passing by, Gilded Cage can be found at 106 St James Street, Brighton BN2 1TP

WIN A FREE TATTOO PHOTOSHOOT

A couple of issues ago we sent Beccy Rimmer to be part of Niall Patterson's photography project 'Beauty Is Not Only Ink Deep'. Niall is photographing tattooed people all over the world to develop a collection of beautiful images, all to help show the stories and amazing people that lie beneath the skin that is inked.

We wanted to give one lucky Skin Deep reader the chance to be part of the project, and the competition is coming to an end soon... this is your last chance to get your entries in! You will need to travel to the studio in Birmingham and you will be given access to your images after the day.

To enter: send a picture of yourself to beccy@skindeep.co.uk telling us a bit about why you want to be part of the project and as always, we'll take care of the rest. Do it.





ALEATORIUM

Kraków-based tattoo artist Szymon Gdowicz [whose work you can also find dotted around this issue] has launched an exciting new art project—Aleatorium.

In an empty plastic tent, Szymon's canvas lies naked and is gradually covered in dark ink. In an organic, artist process, far away from the tattoo studio, he covers the body in streams and splatters of black ink to create a randomly beautiful graphic patens. His intention as an artist is to have a very intimate relationship between model and artist, as the man's body physically replaces Szymon's canvas.

For the artist, the ink splatters resemble calligraphy, or even blog. "The damp ink covering the smooth skin is likely making it shiver, dark streams dripping

over the body tickle and irritate, leaving a graphic mark of disturbing touch," says the Aleatorium website.

Now, onto stage two—as the accidental stains are then tattooed to become a permanent mark on the man's body. Leaving him with a permanent reminder of the time he spent under Szymon's brush.

The project has allowed Szymon to completely break away from the traditional form of tattooing, the normal process of copying a design. "The tattoo becomes as unique as the body it adorns".



Find out more and watch the video: szymongdowicz.wix.com/aleatorium

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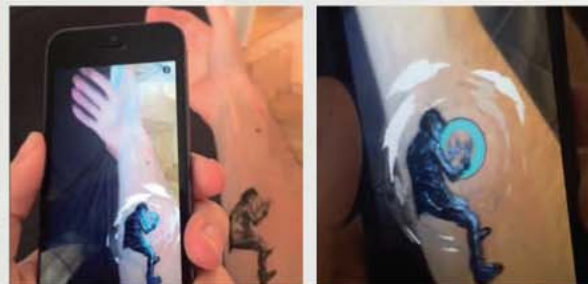
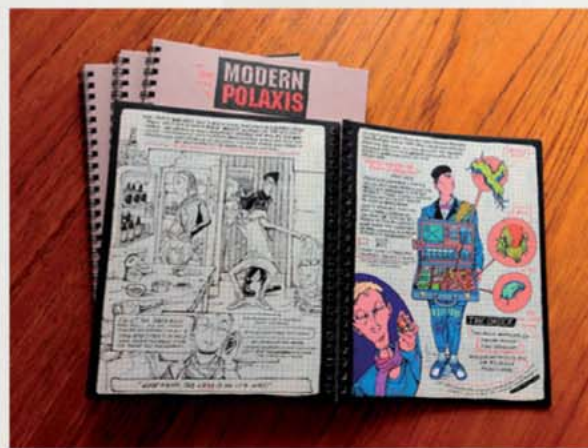
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3D tattoos are no new thing in the world of ink but nobody in the office had ever seen anything quite like this before. The jury is still out on whether it's actually got any mileage beyond being a "thing" that people dig online, but I guess we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't parade it in front of your face regardless.

Created by Australian comic book artist Sutu, the tattoo features an augmented reality that can be revealed with the help of an app powered by Boomcore. On the surface, the tattoo looks like a regular comic book character, but through the lens of the app it comes alive - and quite amazingly so. With swirls of colour radiating from the object in the guy's hand like some character straight of X-Men, a possible (weird) future addition to the world of body art appears to be upon us.

Last year Sutu created a comic book called Modern Polaxis that had hidden messages embedded that readers could unlock with their iPads and this tattoo features a

character from that book. Featuring over 50 pages of hidden audio and animation, Modern Polaxis is the story of a paranoid time-traveller who keeps all his secret information hidden away in a layer of Augmented Reality - you can get hold of the book from nawlz.com/hq/shop

You can follow Sutu on Instagram @sutueatsflies to see this and other awesome things he's done or, if you have a decent attention span, the full site is here: julapy.com, the full Modern Polaxis site is here: modernpolaxis.com, you can find the tech demo on vimeo at vimeo.com/108440373 and if you're still hungry, you can find the app that goes along with all of this by searching Polaxis in the iTunes App Store. If that's not enough, here:

julapy@gmail.com

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by
Kel Tait



“To help people prepare their ideas for me, I have an auto response everyone receives when they first contact me. Not everyone knows exactly what they want and are unsure of how to communicate how they want their tattoo to look, so hopefully this info helps them—and in turn assists me in interpreting what they are after—even if they don’t really know themselves. Susannah fell in love with the cheeky persona of raccoons during some time spent in the USA. It was important for her that the cheekiness was represented in the piece—which is a great thing to point out because that’s a huge part of what went into making the tattoo what it is. Two other components that were important to her were the tail and the paws of the raccoon.

“Most clients are great—they know how to get the best out of me and give me a basic idea and let me run with it. I’m never as happy with the works that have strict guidelines placed upon them. Sometimes, it’s smart to trust your artist and let them make a few changes along the way to get the best out of them.”

Third Eye Tattoo, Melbourne

[facebook.com/kel.tait.tattoo](https://www.facebook.com/kel.tait.tattoo)

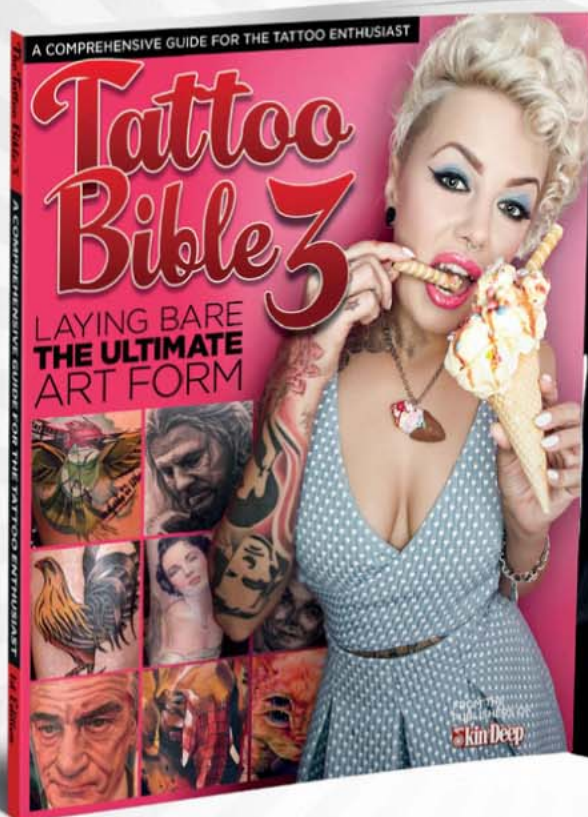
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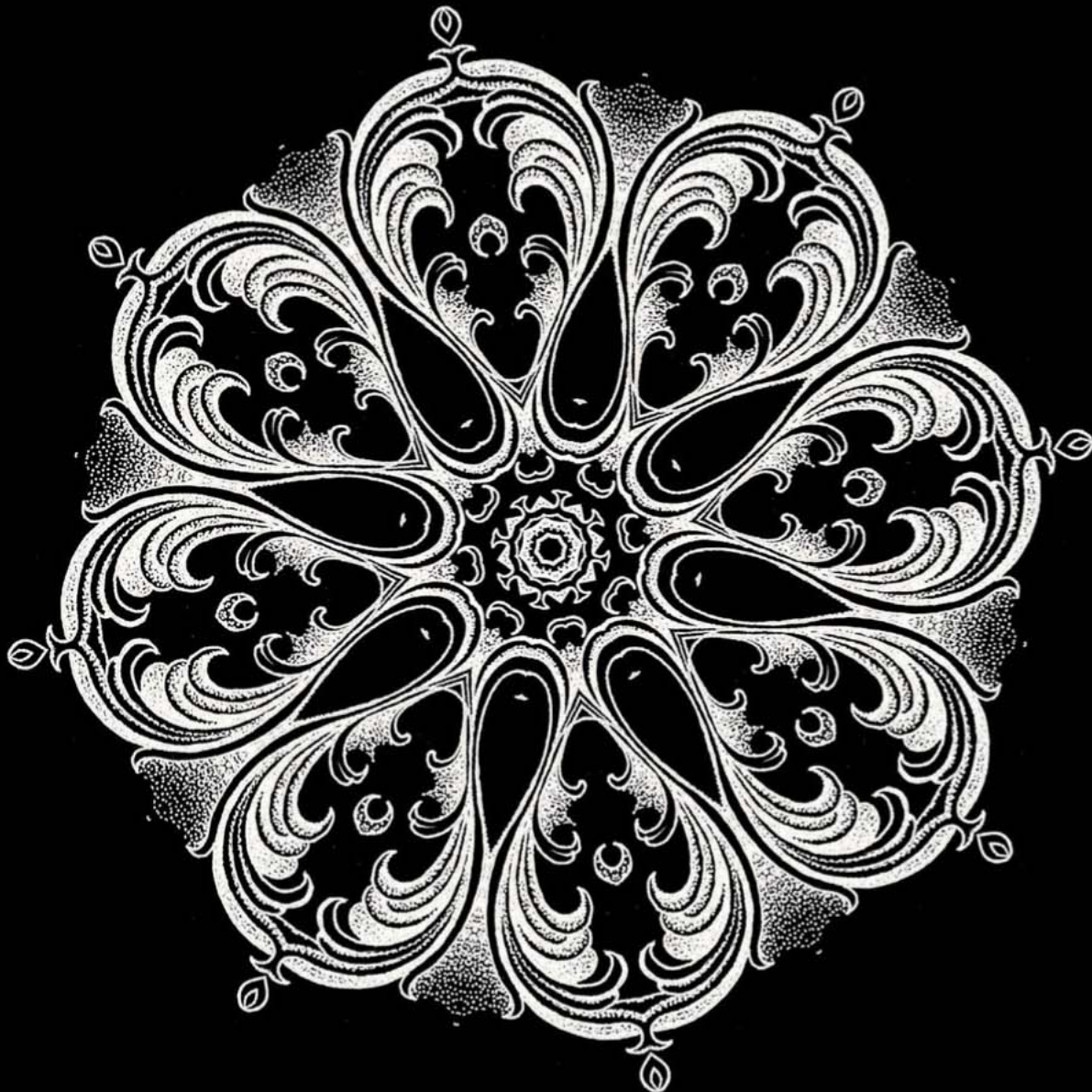
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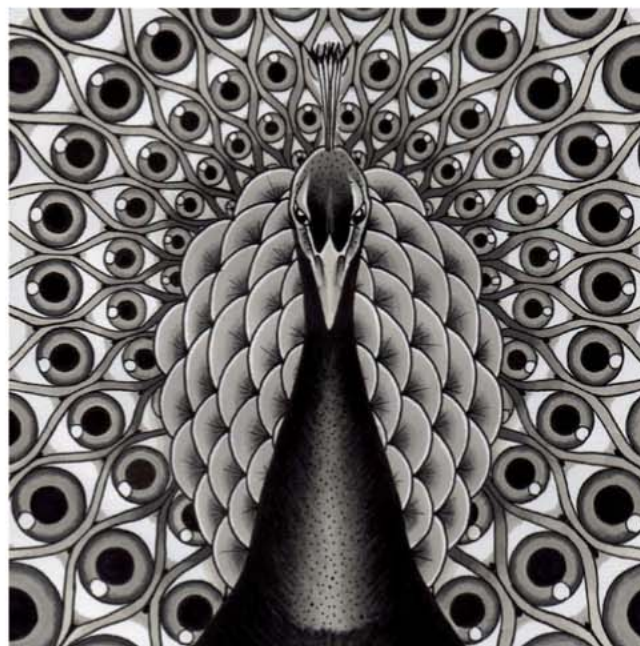
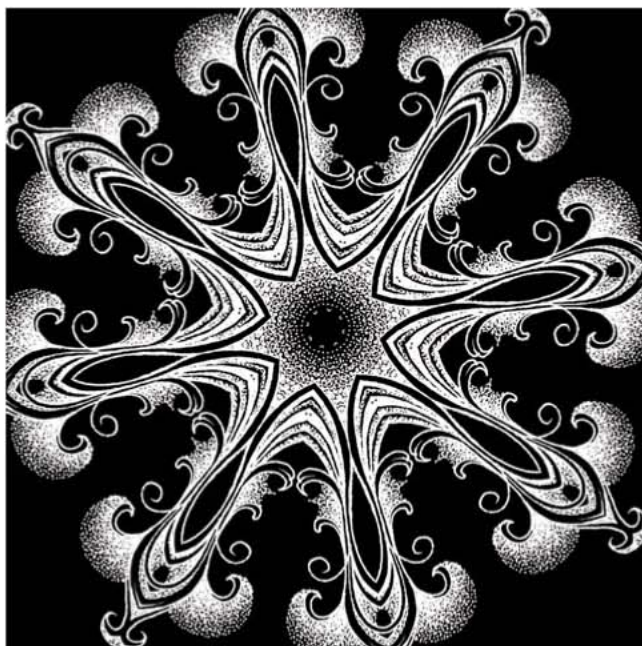
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BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

As we were taking a look at some of the artwork created by Jonny Breeze [Dead Slow, Brighton], we entered a discussion about symmetry in a tattoo and the results were too important to pass over easily. Thus, this issue, a slightly off kilter Behind Closed Doors, but it's worth it.

jonnybreeze.co
instagram.com/jonnybreeze





I've always been drawn to symmetrical images and I came across dotwork geometric tattooing early on in my career. There's a strong symmetrical element to this kind of work especially with mandalas and repeating patterns and realised how much I liked repetition in addition to symmetry. At the time I was trying out many different styles, trying to figure out what I was best at and the dotwork style came a lot more naturally to me than other techniques. Being able to experiment with different styles has allowed me to introduce various influences in the one tattoo. I found that symmetry always has a strong impact and has a certain visual appeal and started introducing it into my work, trying to encourage regular customers to get chest and back tattoos!

It takes more than just symmetry to make work like this look good though. A lot is down to balance between tones and also the right level of detail for it to look good in the skin. When you're dealing with intricate designs, there's a chance it could look a bit of a mess—it needs to read well and for that you need to be clever with the way the shapes are emphasised with layers and contrast. Placement on the body is also really important. There's a certain amount of preparation you can do but on the day of the tattoo, you have to 'listen' to the body and what it's telling you when you are figuring out placement and the way a design on a flat piece of paper is going to wrap round the body's contours. A tattoo can either work with the body and compliment it or fight it and look totally out of place and I think it's good to trust those niggling doubts when a stencil first goes on. Sometimes you realise you need something totally non symmetrical to suit the area you're working with.

People still ask for symmetrical tattoos on very non symmetrical areas like the side of the ribs and arms and

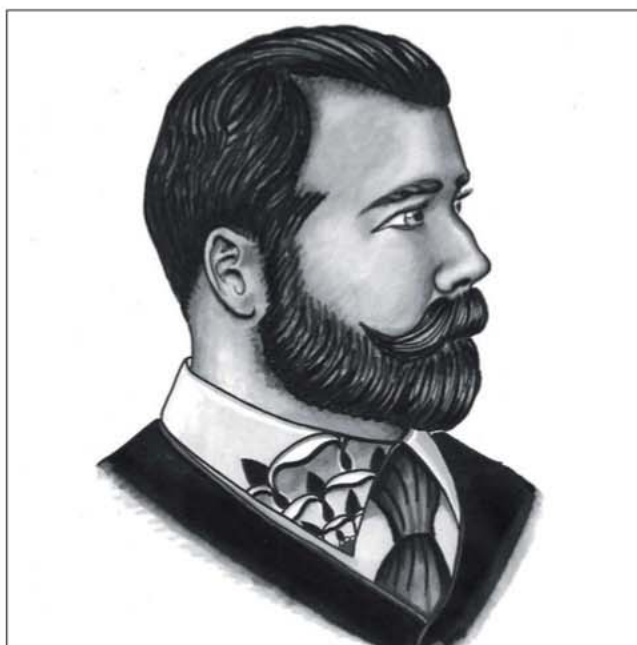
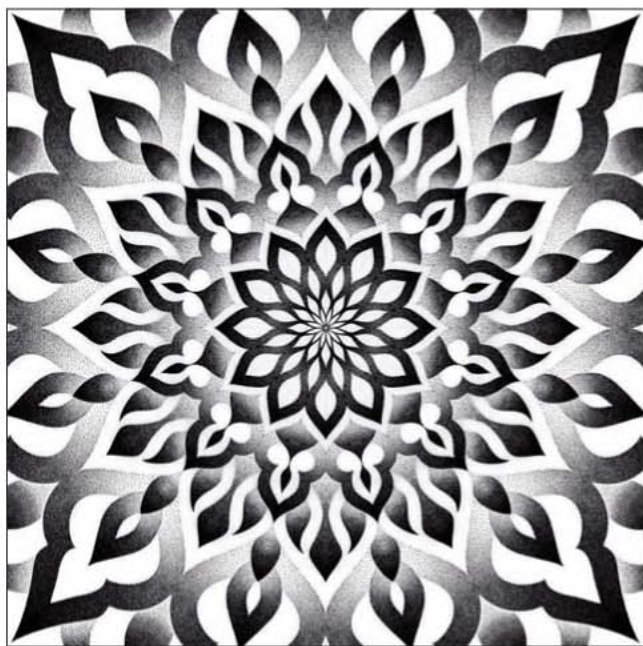


parts of the legs. You have to consider how these areas will move and warp an image that looks one way on a piece of paper but quite different on the body. I quite often have to guide people away from strict symmetry on these parts of the body. I sometimes may use more than one symmetrical image in a non symmetrical way to make

**SYMMETRY ALWAYS
HAS A STRONG IMPACT
AND HAS A CERTAIN
VISUAL APPEAL**

up for the movement and strange shapes in these areas. Even supposedly symmetrical parts of the body are in fact quite wonky. For example when putting a symmetrical stencil on a back or front, you really start to notice just how

wonky most people are—shoulders are quite often uneven, one nipple may be higher than the other, the spine may be curved and the belly button not in the centre. The challenge then becomes making this work on an imperfect body and making the image strong enough to override these imperfections.



Creating consistency in areas of solid black can be quite a challenge. Creating smooth gradients from solid black to light grey can also be hard but the hardest is definitely getting good, constant, solid black.

I look at some other tattoo artists solid black work and am in awe. One of the problems is that people's skin is so different—some people have skin that soaks ink up like a sponge and other people's skin seems to spit it straight out, but tattooing always remains interesting if you treat it as a life long learning curve.

Off skin, for my work on paper, I'm using Staedtler pigment liner pens for most of my outlines but always on the look out for the perfect lining pen. These pens are pretty

good for drawing dots too and you can be pretty precise with them. I'm really enjoying using Letraset Promarkers for getting really nice tones and shades in illustrations.

I'm always thinking I should be doing more drawing. I'd love to have a larger portfolio of illustrations and artwork but it's hard to find the time to do all the work I'd like to. Tattooing can be pretty exhausting and it's hard to carry on focusing into the evening with design work. I look at some tattooists who have huge portfolios of artwork in addition to their tattoos and am always so impressed. I have to remind myself that whilst it's good to have aspirations, it's not good to compare yourself with others. Everyone has their own pace and their own things going on in their lives. ▣

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SCARE STORIES

In The Land of the Rising Sun, not everything is as it seems. A place known for its rich ancient history, its cultural delicacies, and more recently for its superb standard of life, Japan also has a darker claim to fame. A secret that I was told is "very, very underground..."

Whilst walking around The Great British Tattoo Show last year, my cider in one hand, and my notepad in the other, I came across a stall and an artist who we shall call Barratt (he wanted to keep his true identity a secret for reasons that will become clear later). He was working out of Scandinavia at the time, but he had been an apprentice in Japan for a number of years, and it was he who told me about the 'shady' world of Japan's human canvas industry.

Unlike in the UK, where there still appears to be some debate on the issue, I was told that tattooing in Japan was considered an art form. The traditional method of tattooing, and the name given to it in Japan, is irezumi. It is a method of hand-poking the ink under the skin without the reliance on stencils or machines, and some say that it dates back as far as 10,000 BC.

Throughout Japan's extensive history tattoos have been used for a variety of meanings and identifications. At one time criminals were marked on their arms as a means of identification. This was done as a warning to society; if a man had a tattoo on the arm he was to be avoided, and refused service and employment. At the turn of the 20th century the ruling Japanese government, in a move to make a positive impression on the West, outlawed the practice of tattooing completely, forcing the artists and consumers underground.

According to Margo DeMello's book Encyclopedia of



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ART FORM**

Body Art, it was not until 1948 that tattooing was legalised again. By this time though, after 30 years of being outlawed, and due to its history of being used to mark law-breakers, tattooing had been associated with criminality. And the most notorious of Japan's criminals were/are the yakuza.

Though many of its members hold positions in media organisations and in public office, support and membership appears to be falling. The Guardian reported that "the number of people belonging to Japan's notorious yakuza crime groups fell to an all-time low in 2013, slipping below the 60,000-member mark for the first time on record."

Despite this, yakuza members are still able to greatly influence Japan's society, culture, and politics—and their apparent love of crime seems to be matched only by their love of tattoos.

Though hidden away in public, underneath long-sleeve shirts and high collars, yakuza members sport some of the largest and most intricate

body suits in the world. Many are almost completely covered from their neck down to their ankles. Yakuza still use the traditional methods of tattooing, visiting experienced irezumi master artists in order to achieve their body coverage. It was whilst tattooing was illegal the yakuza adopted the practice as their own, and it soon became, in the words of Horitoku Shorai, a Tokyo-based master artist, "an inseparable part of their lifestyle."

As we all know, tattoos can be an expensive addiction.

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AS WE ALL KNOW, TATTOOS CAN BE AN EXPENSIVE ADDICTION. IN JAPAN THIS PRICE IS MAGNIFIED

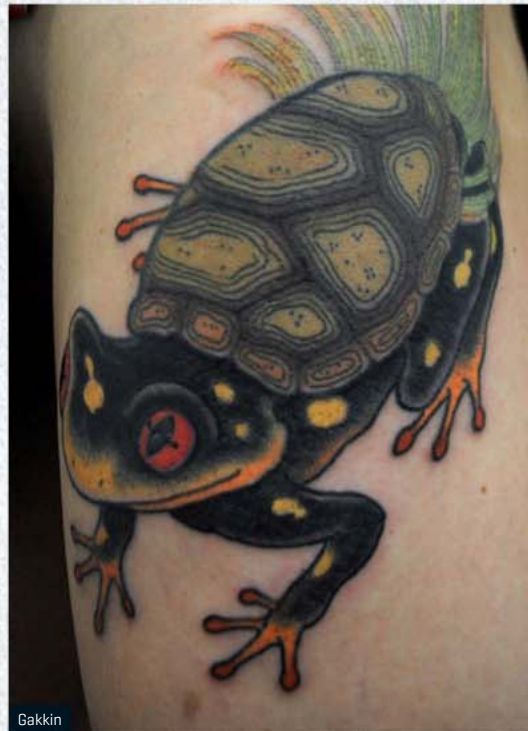


B Ball

In Japan this price is magnified due to the limited number of artists that are available, and the relative privacy (or should that be secrecy) of the shops. Writing for Japan Times in 2014, Jon Mitchell states that the country had only 3,000 artists. The exquisite work produced, and the limited number of people able to produce it, means that tattoos can cost big money. However, I was told that in Japan, yakuza don't just get tattoos for themselves.

Barratt had told me that "there are some families in Japan that invest in you getting a tattoo." He said "they pay for the tattoo and a further £60,000 on one condition." This condition, as he has heard it, is that "on death they are permitted to take what is theirs."

"Tattooing in Japan is considered a highly-prized and valuable art as it can make mil-



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Horinao

lions as a stretched canvas in underground black markets." As Barratt understood it, a yakuza member or criminal family would pay for someone to host artwork on their body, paying for the ink, and giving a little extra to the host. The host, for want of a better word, would continue with their life as usual, with the artwork on their skin increasing in value year after year.

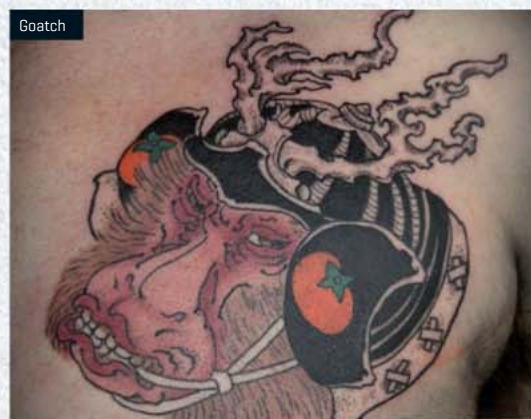
The idea of a human canvas, and a host subject, is perhaps a little disturbing, but what is more worrying is that Barratt says these families are not always the most patient of characters. Many families may have to wait 80 years in order to collect their artwork for selling, but 80 years is a long time to wait for the millions of pounds it can make on the black market.

Barratt says that "greedy family members in strong families with a lot of underground connections could easily stage an accident to collect earlier if they are impatient. At any

Gotch



Ton



Goatch

COULD THERE REALLY EXIST AN UNDERGROUND BLACK MARKET FOR TATTOOED HUMAN SKIN?

one time" he says, "a family can have around 100 people waiting to be dissected at death."

Though amazed, I was also sceptical about what Barratt had told me. Could there really exist an underground black market for tattooed human skin? After endless amounts of time trawling through forums, websites, and academic papers, I found evidence that Barratt was not misleading me.

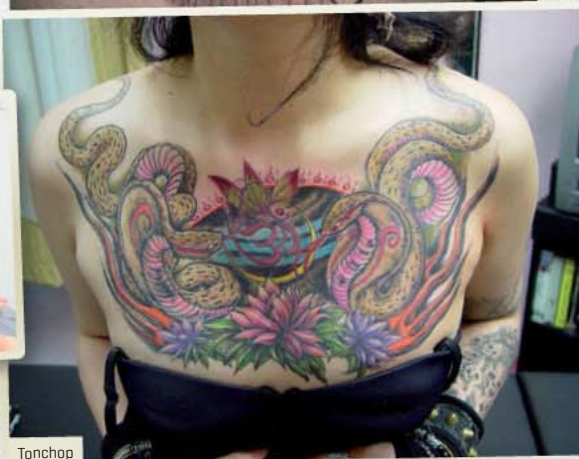
In the Jikei Medical University there is on display an almost intact body suit taken from a yakuza member in the 1930s. Richard Slater wrote a thesis in 2011 titled *Hung Out To Dry: A Multidisciplinary Analysis and Recording of a Preserved 19th Century Tattooed Human Skin*. In this he features the yakuza canvas and states that it is "believed to have been bequeathed by its occupant in return for free medical care during life."



King Rat

Inna Rosca is another who has stumbled across the grizzly practice. In a paper entitled *Pain for Pride* she also comments on how "body suits have been removed from their owners after death". She continues by saying "rumours persist that collectors still buy tattooed human skin even though the practice is illegal."

With tattooing on a seemingly endless rise in popularity, perhaps it will not be too long before you too are approached by a wealthy family with a briefcase full of money... ▣



Tonchop



Scenes from the *SALT LAKE CITY* INTERNATIONAL TATTOO ARTS CONVENTION 2015

[Salt Palace Convention Center MARCH 27, 28 & 29]

In our quest to find some of the greatest shows on planet earth, a couple of months ago, we hit Salt Lake City to see what gems lay thousands of miles from home and what did we find? Magic...

March 26th and I was walking through the streets of Salt Lake City in camouflage shorts and a t-shirt like it was mid July. The weather was a shock after coming to town from the snowy mountains of Breckenridge Colorado the week before. I was headed down to Lost Art Tattoo, the host shop of the annual Salt Lake City International Tattoo Arts Convention. I had just dropped off my photo gear at the hotel and checked out what was going on during setup on the convention hall floor. Even though the convention was not opening until 3pm the next day there was lots of action going on, tattoo flash being hung, and booths being assembled. One of the first faces I saw is that of

Nate Drew, Owner of Lost Art and partner of the convention with Flaco Productions. It had been almost 5 months since I had last seen Nate and he had lost easily 30 pounds and was cruising up on his skateboard as I greeted him with a "look at this skinny mini" as he laughed and gave me a firm handshake. We had a quick chat and he had to rush off to handle some artists trying to register for the weekend at the front entrance.

4:30 pm: I went back to the hotel thinking I would lay down for a few minutes before meeting with my friends from Denver for dinner. I woke up six hours later at 1am.



Luckily during convention times it was still early for people still hanging out. I got myself together and found a few familiar faces lingering around in the hotel lobby about to go have a smoke outside. I found myself in conversation with Las Vegas tattoo legend Doc Dog. I was showing him how I had found an episode of the 70's tv show "Quincy" he had told me about, where the producers of the show came to him for consultation about an episode they were doing that involved the case being solved by a tattoo the suspect had.

Doc had even rented the show one of his personal tattoo machines to use in the filming. Little did he know they would even use his name in the show as the person who did the tattoo and mention a signature dog paw print icon that was supposedly

the signature trademark of all his tattoos. The way Doc found out the episode aired was when he came into work one day and there was a line of 50 people waiting at the door wondering why they had not gotten their trademark Doc Dog signature! It was great to hear the story from him and actually see the episode. (It can be watched on Netflix, Quincy Season 6 episode 16 called "To Kill in Plain Sight").

Surprisingly, people went to bed pretty early that night, 4am is early when it comes to these tattoo gatherings, but in just a few hours everyone was grabbing breakfast and headed to load in for day one of the three day convention.



There was a lot to check out as usual. A 100 plus custom painted skateboard art exhibition called "Create or Die" that was amazing to see. Artists from around the world have painted and illustrated the boards creating works of art that I hope would never see the top side of a street curb. The 100 back piece art showcase by Tilt "Built of Tradition" which was a full wall display of completed back piece drawings.

The very first booth when you walked in the doors was a memorial set up for a long time friend and artist of Lost Art tattoo that lost his life in a car accident shortly after the last Salt Lake convention in the middle of moving. David Ellwanger, aka Schmoe, is truly missed by everyone who ever met him.

Some of the familiar faces I saw this year were the always smiling Karen Cosleigh and Ian Jones of Oliver Peck's True Tattoo in Hollywood California (truetattoo-hollywood.com). Also in town Keet D'Arms of Southern Star Tattoo in Atlanta Georgia, Scott Ferguson and Mike Pinto of Thick As Thieves Tattoo in Denver Colo-

rado, and my main man William Thidemann and his crew from Mammoth American Denver.

As usual I got to hang out with old friends and make a bunch of new ones as well. Always good to see Rikki Bailey of Garage Art Studio in Longview Texas. Rikki has been a guest judge for most of the years I have been photographing this convention.

The weekends contests were the most attended that I have seen over the past few years, nearly every chair in the audience was packed to see the amazing pieces that had been entered to win the awards of the weekend. Back pieces, sleeves, even worst tattoo trophies were given out to the elite art of the day as they gave everyone a glimpse of what talent there is in their tattoo community.

So many vendors with rad gear were attending, of course. There was H2Ocean, and Mike Skivers Tattoo Museum, and the always supported Tattoo's Cure Cancer (tattooscurecancer.com) booth raffle to name a few. One of my new favourites this year was Skull Jewelry (skulljewelry.com) that had the best rings among other





things made out of stainless steel at crazy low prices. I think I bought like six rings from them.

This year we set up the "Tattoo Yearbook" photo booth right next to the contest registration, which proved to be by far the busiest it has ever been simply because people were sent directly in after signing up to the booth. The work speaks for itself, inspiring and elaborate, and technically advanced. From traditional to oil painting styled back pieces, the work was again unbelievable and a pleasure to photograph.

During the final day I was lucky enough to get my hand blasted by Matt Hays of Mammoth American Tattoo in Denver Colorado. It was my first hand piece and Matt had drawn a sick Asian dragon head for it. It is now my favourite piece of work to date and I enjoy showing it off to everyone who'll spare me five minutes.

The next day, people were heading out early and getting in some final hang time while waiting for Uber and airport shuttles - we all missed a trick investing in those little gems I can tell you... ▣

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Never say die

Tattoos have always been inextricably linked to the concept of mortality. Beccy Rimmer wanted to delve further into how... and why



My body is a completely temporary canvas



Giena Todryk



Giena Todryk



Giena Todryk

Most people I know that chose to get a tattoo have a reason why. They choose an image or text that represents a concept—a concept that will transcend the passage of time in that person's life. Quite often its meaning speaks for the departure of a loved one, or our own acknowledgement of life's brevity.

Sometimes, the reactions from others about why we get tattooed, actually support the fact that as humans we are in denial about our own impermanence. But you'll have that on your body forever? What will it look like when you are older?

The word forever need not exist in our own vocabularies. Comments like these are blind to the painful truth that a) our bodies aren't forever, and b) they can disappear suddenly at any time. We believe we are invincible, and that is why we fear anything permanent.

This is one of the reasons I get inked myself—my body is a completely transitory canvas and the world is full of much scarier things than the concept that I might live long enough to see memorable artwork on my wrinkly skin. If at the age of 80 I am still here to breathe the air around me, they will be deep breaths of happiness and reflection, never those of regret for how I might look on the outside.

We don't like to talk about dying. No doubt many people won't have read this article following its introduction, on the basis that it could arouse 'morbid' thoughts. We brush it under the carpet and we do everything we can to pretend that after departure, our souls live on.

We follow religions, we believe in a higher being, we keep belongings of loved ones—we collect memories, trinkets, pictures, words, hope, things and tattoos.

The fourth tattoo I ever had was a tulip on my right arm. Following my grandma's funeral, pink tulips followed me around—I saw them everywhere in the subsequent weeks, and so made the decision to tattoo that symbol on my body forever, accompanied by a quote from a song that made me envisage where she might be now.

Those flowers didn't literally follow me around. We all have different opinions about afterlife but I inherently know that my grandma did not send me fuchsia flowers from the grave. Her last breath was her last breath and biologically, scientifically, physically and mentally she



Jacob Pedersen

My name is Giena Todryk, I'm a tattoo artist from Belarus, currently working in Poland. Most people I tattoo are looking for a design that will mean something to them, but there are literally thousands of reasons and ideas – every person is different. Over the years I have created many commemorative tattoos and I think they can help to deal with the loss.



We strive to find meaning that will allow that person to live on

will never live on past the last moment of her existence. But I still pretend that she does.

Having a memorial tattoo for her was a huge part of the healing process. In the grieving period we all hit a wall where we feel we can't continue. What ensues is an exploratory period of strife to make sure that person lives on—that's why we get those tattoos.

And that's what we will always do, as human beings. As our own transience confounds us we endeavour to explain it, and that's a beautiful thing. The rituals we create give us warmth and strength. Tattoos are a huge part of that.

One of the most traditional tattoo symbols is that of the skull—one of most recognised motifs in the world. It's the one thing every single human and animal on the entire planet shares and as a tattoo, it can act as a reminder of what's beneath.

Skull tattoos, especially on women, can be seen as quite tasteless. I think some reactions of dislike can stem from people's deep-rooted fear of that skull is all we are. Skin and bones, and one day, it will be all that's left.

Back in issue 250, I talked of the air of

Anyone who gets a tattoo lives for the present moment



ALL images on this page: Szymon Gdowicz



I am Szymon Gdowicz, a painter and tattoo artist and I work at Kult Tattoo Fest in Kraków, Poland. I don't think about death in relation to tattooing, to be honest. I think tattoos are about life. A tattoo appears on living tissue, running blood is what makes it real. But I do think putting a picture of a deceased loved one on our skin gives them a new life, which is connected to our own.

Soho (London), and its impulse to live for the moment. This month, I wanted to take that one step further and show my hope that actually anyone who gets a tattoo, lives for the present moment too.

As I write this article, I realise it takes such a radical format in comparison to what I would normally write outside of my own column—but why should

we not dedicate significant space to thinking about our own ephemerality here on earth. What could be more important? Maybe this will spark you to make a tattoo (or life) decision you were unsure about. What have you got to lose?

After the demise of loved ones, we might hang a few pictures in our homes and we'll keep a box of belongings in our attics. We forget that they're gone and we move on. A part of us feels we'll see them

again one day, and the other part doesn't think about what could be the unfortunate truth.

We're very practical beings—out of sight, out of mind. With something not shoved right before our face, our brains cease to think about it. It's survival. The world doesn't stop just because someone dies and we have to continue taking steps forward. I've written this entire article without actually using the word 'death'. We'll always find a euphemism for it.

I began writing this piece with the feeling that, by inking the symbols of loved ones on our bodies, we're dismissing the inevitable. We're sweetening the bitter truth.

But actually, that's not the case. Maybe you've got a quote, skull, name date, flower, portrait—whatever you have, by having it you're keeping the truth closer than ever. You're not packing it away, you're looking it in the face every day. I think that makes tattooed folk quite strong.

In decades to come, these magazines too will be hidden away in chalky cases. And even though we can't take those dusty attic boxes with us, who knows, maybe we'll take our ink. ▣





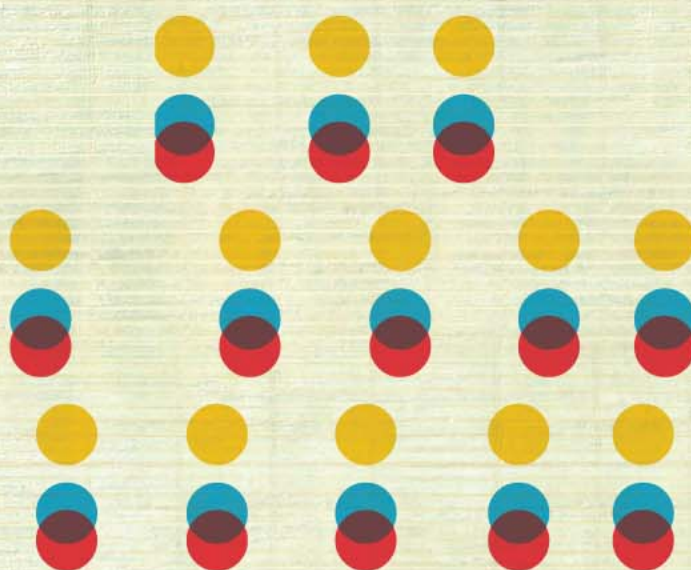
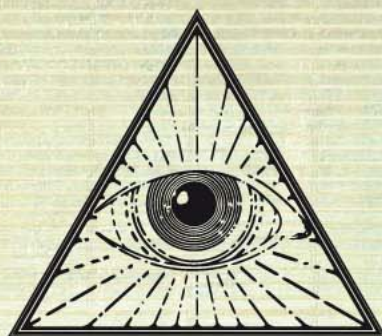
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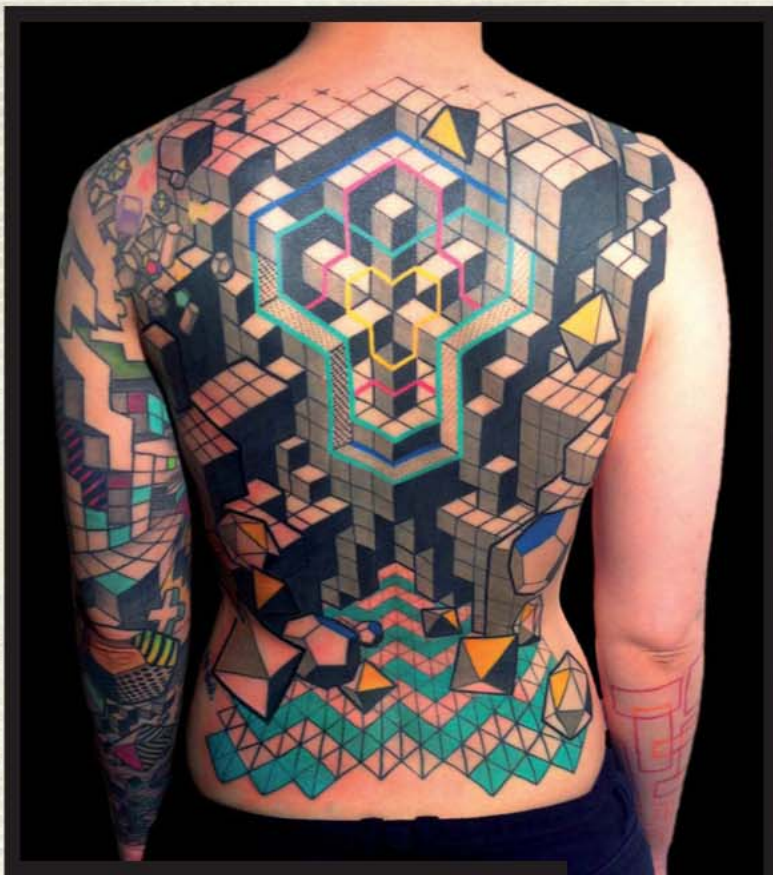
Surrounded by architects, designers and artists in the jewish area of Zürich, the neighbourhood where Neo opened his studio is a good reflection of his background. You would not expect Neo Tattoo to be a typical studio that welcomes walk-ins...

 neotattoos

And it's not. There are no signs on the outside of the beautiful old building, only a small sticker on the bottom of the clear shop front that suggests you would expect a dentist to open the door. Neo made it to fit to his priorities. Structured, clean but also quiet and comfortable. This is the space where the 37 years old Austrian born artist finds the perfect conditions to focus on his customer's work, express his love for art toys and shapes the next step of the 21st century's tattooed body.

What did you have in mind when you opened your studio?
I needed a quiet place, where I can feel at home and the

customer feels comfortable. I don't like noisy studios. I really need to focus and concentrate on my work, especially with the geometric stuff that requires a lot of attention. The older I get, the more distracted I am. I really need to have my structures. That's how I work best. You have to optimise your learning through your life, your working process, and here I can have all the rules and structures that I need for myself. Also, if you have this connection with your customer—because tattoo is a two way process—walk-ins destroy this little flower that grows between you; there is magic and vibes happening and I really appreciate that. My creativity and inspiration come from this.



Tattoo artists tend to specialise themselves but you keep working different styles at the same time, why?

They are all interesting. They are all different and I'm sure you can learn something from anything you get interested in. What I like is to connect styles that you would not expect to be connected. I like to build bridges that make something interesting and new. Actually, I can take from everything I see, then I try to cook it in my style. I really take tribal seriously. Tribal is a hard thing to do. I like to work like Leo Zulueta, on heavy black stuff. I spend hours and hours drawing the perfect tribal. You have to find three or four good flows that match each other. I'm also inter-



ested in traditional tattoos because it is simple and strong and I'm tending to lose myself in too many lines. On the other hand, I don't like the rules that are attached to how to do it, that leads to conformity—they all look the same and it's boring for me.

How much are you experimenting in your work?

I want to move forward, that's why I called myself Neo. I want to be new, to reinvent myself every day. I'm changing, the world is changing, my interests are changing and



First tattoo?

1997, the one I got for the graffiti job.

First studio you worked in?

Stichtag, Graz

Blade Runner or 2001?

Blade Runner

Comic hero?

I really like the Maxx, very different from the other guys.

If you could improve yourself, what would you add?

Underwater-lungs

Science-Fiction or Cyber-Punk?

Science-Fiction

A very special book to you?

The Aleister Crowley's

Toth tarot

Any collection?

Art toys and

Bandai robots

Time or space travel?

Time, to go back to

see these Pyramids.

Favourite dish

that you cook for

your girlfriend?

Ricotta, spinach

cannelloni.

I want to keep it flowing. I don't want to do the same things every day. Besides, I'm never satisfied with my work and I'm always doubting my skills, so it took me a long time to find confidence, but I think it's that way with every artist. If you're satisfied with what you do 100%, why should you continue doing it? It's like a mechanical arm I did; once I felt satisfied with it, I was done with doing mech-style. I reached a lot of aspects that I strived to build altogether. It's like checking things, when it's done I move on, otherwise it becomes like copying yourself and I hate that. Same with the geometric—people come to me and ask for things I did years ago and I say no, I can't do the same thing over and over again.

Your tattoos are very impressive technically, how did your education help you in your work?

I studied art, architecture and industrial design. I really like shapes, forms and geometry and have my whole life. That's very important—to get a feeling for the things around you and the proportions... and also how things work and come together, styling and designing. I learnt a lot during those years including 3D modelling and how to use Photoshop.

Do your tattoos need a lot of preparation?

Yes, there is a long and hard process before doing the tattoos and people don't realise it. I work 24/7. On Sunday night I'm on my computer. I use it when I start a new project. I print and then work on it and print it again etc., then I put the colours into it. I build all these patterns that I use myself. I don't copy it from the internet and then paste it into Photoshop. I built them line by



line because I want it that way. I want to create everything I do myself, then I can really say it's part of me. That's important. My computer is full of patterns and shapes I did for myself and will never be tattooed because they are complicated or boring. I guess I have built my own database.

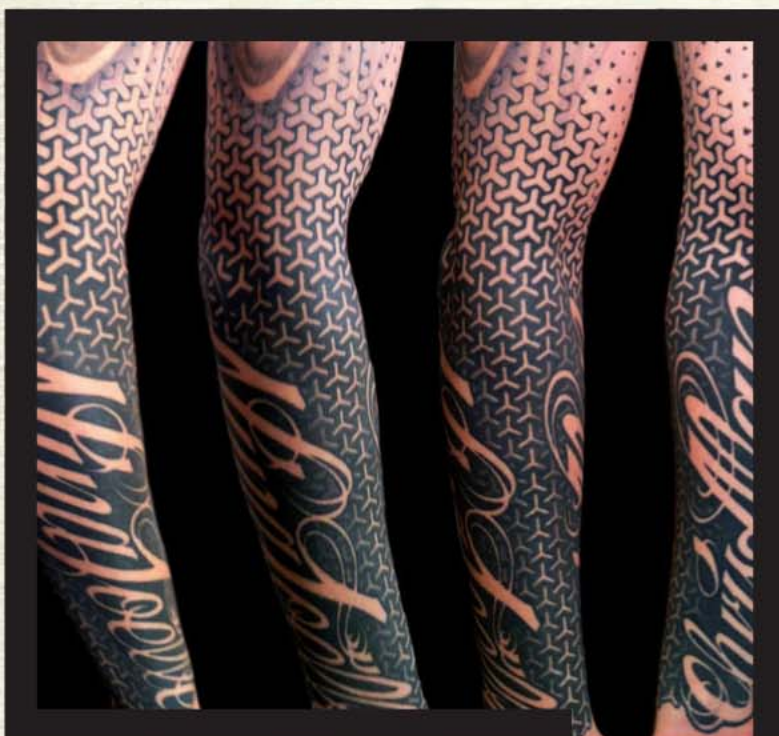
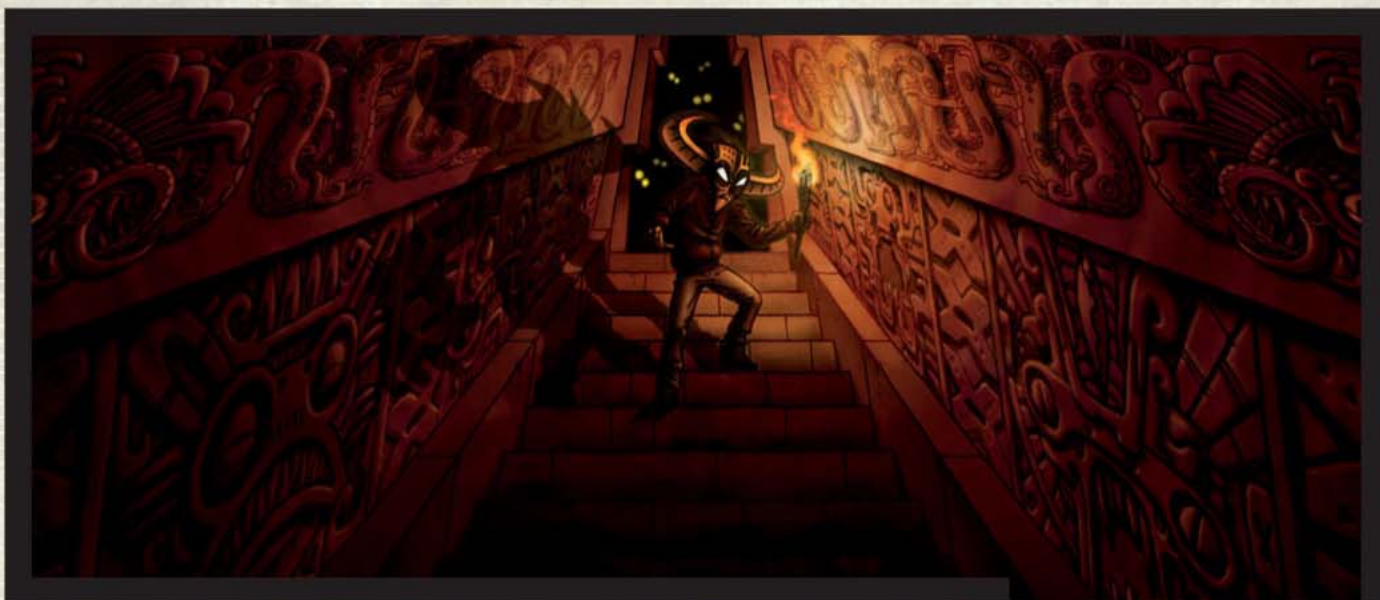
Where does this fascination for geometry comes from?

I have a very spiritual and philosophical approach to it. Geometry is not modern, it's not old, it's simply been there forever. It's a mind shape, the language of creation, of God if you like. Geometry is not good or bad, its clean and pure. I think geometry is just a visual expression

of mathematic and numbers. I think I will study it for the rest of my life.

You seem to be very interested in past civilisations, why?

For mechanical aesthetics consideration, I like this modern perfection that is in there. I'm a really spiritual thinking guy and that's why I like antique culture very much because the focus on spirituality was much more present back then. Like the Mayan culture—it is wonderful, it's very strong to me, the astrology... also the Egyptians with their clear geometry, massive blocks, and all the histories and mysteries behind that, the meanings of the shapes in the middle of the de-



sert are really intriguing. There is a lot of inspiration. The older the better.

How did your interest in graffiti help you in tattooing?

Actually, my first contact with a tattoo studio was with a tattoo shop for which the owner asked me to do his façade. I started graffiti at the age of 16 in Graz (Austria) and got known for my work and had some commissions. I did it and I asked him for a tattoo as payment. It later turned out I learnt tattooing there for two years. But I kept the idea of choosing one overall-flow, I like dynamic. I find it in the lines and shapes the body gives you, it's pretty easy. Just have a

look at any anatomy book. You have all those lines. I think that's a wonderful possibility for artists. Every little finger, arm... is so perfect and special, there are so many possibilities in the movement. So much more compared to the flat wall that you work on in graffiti. Painting bodies is far more satisfying.

How does it feel to be that interested in new technologies and working at the same time with the relatively old tool of the tattoo machine?

I've used the Dragonfly for some years now and I think it's one of the more modern interpretations of the machine. I don't like coil machines, the noise, the weight... there are so many possibilities of failure in there and I don't want to think about my material when I work. I tried the



modern rotary machine too but the Dragonfly is very reliable and that's modern enough for me. I'm really looking forward to getting myself a wireless because I hate those cables. It's super expensive but I need to have one.

Any influences in tattooing ?

I don't know many tattoo artists and I don't read many tattoo magazines. I don't allow too many influences into my source field and that's how I keep my style pure. That's how I grew up. I was always creating my own world and I don't like people to come into it especially in the artistic field. I like being a geek, a freak or whatever you may call me. Then again, I really like to visit Gerhard Wiesbeck, doing big black body-suits in Germany, he's a really nice guy and so concentrated and passionate about what he does. I like



him as an artist and as a person. I also spend a lot of time with Sandro Spahn in Solothurn, he's doing great Japanese and graffiti. Very inspiring, as both an artist and as a friend. ▣



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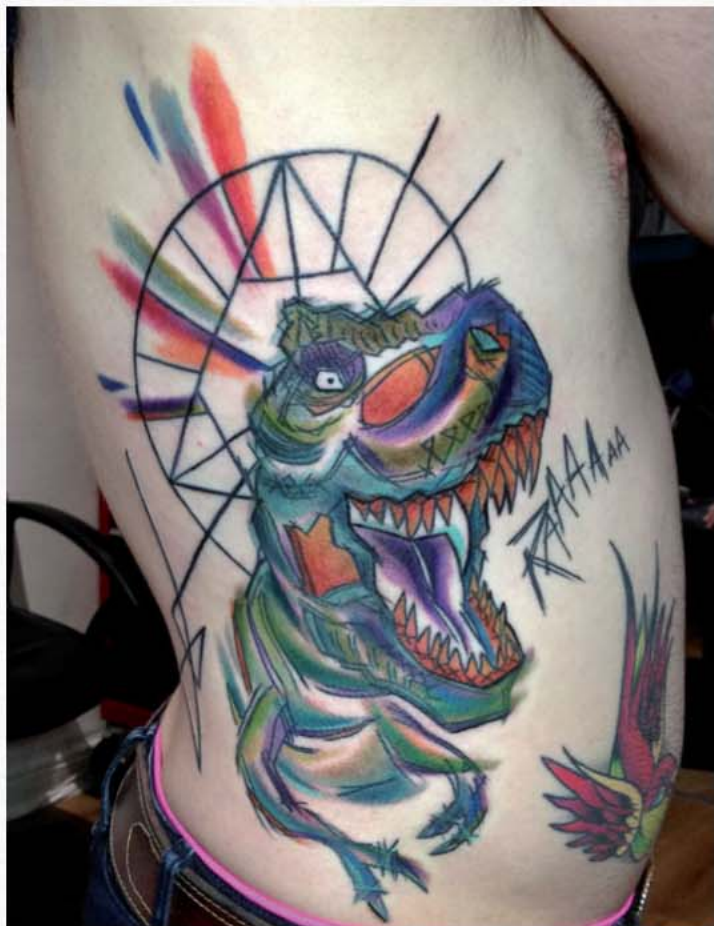
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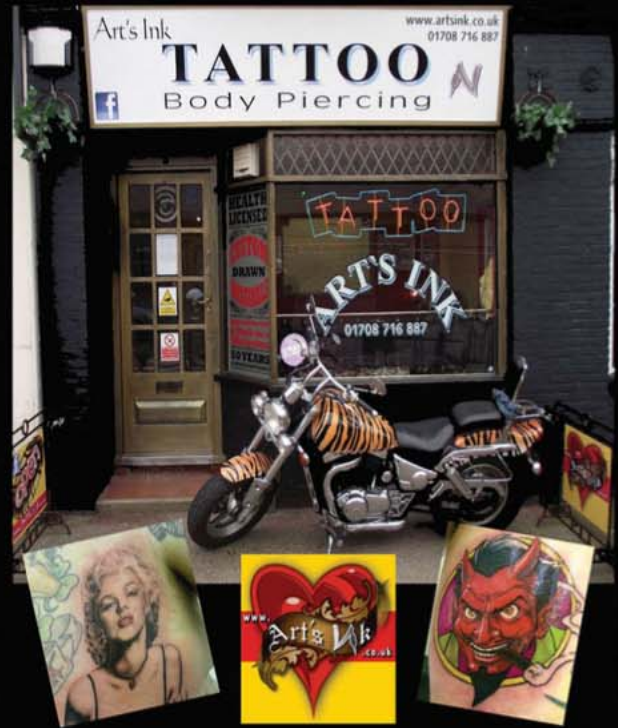
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WLK

Living on a Prayer

(or *How we all came to be
living in a 'first draft' world*)

Have you ever stopped to really see at what you're looking at online? It might be good for business, but is it helping or hindering the art we're all so enamoured with?

It's been a while since I wrote what's known in magazine-land as a 'thought piece', so you'll excuse me if I come in through the back door and wander around while I get my bearings. Be warned: I may never get my bearings but I'll dig some holes along the way and see what happens. Maybe we'll all learn something.

Last week, a studio made a passing comment to me that was frankly, priceless. They shall remain nameless but the crux of it went something like this:

"Hey, maybe you can help us with something. I don't think we're the only ones experiencing this but we're finding that when we're posting images on Facebook and Instagram (insert your online drug of choice here), people aren't actually seeing the art. It's passing in front of their eyes as fast as they can scroll down the page, but they're not actually seeing what we're posting. Have you heard this too?"

That's more or less the gist of it and the answer is yes... I have heard this. More than once and this is something that's more than important from the other side of the fence too—for 'other side of the fence', you can read: collector.

So how exactly are we all looking at tattoos in 2015?

This raises the question of how we're looking at anything in 2015. Let's me use a music analogy because it's something most of us will have in common. Time was, music came on a slab of vinyl and even on a shitty deck, you could get soul out of it. Fast forward a little and along came CD which promised superior sound. I can't comment on whether it did or not because my ears were destroyed by then but the real damage came in other forms. With a mini cover, and 5 point text, we collectively stopped reading sleeve notes—which meant we also stopped learning who wrote or produced stuff... to such a point that eventually nobody bothered to spend any money on album art. Come full circle and today, a lot of people are heading back to vinyl to get their kicks and not just for the sound quality. There's something tangible about it that makes it special again—for both those who missed it and for those to whom it's a new thing. Admittedly, some enter into it because it's a 'cool thing to do', but for a lot of fans it's simply the right way to listen to music.

Transfer all of this into the tattoo world.

There was a time when getting a tattoo amounted to



So how exactly are we all looking at tattoos in 2015?

the boundaries of your home town—that's the truth for the majority of us. You would go in, check out the racks or take your own design if you were brave, and it was very much an exchange of services and not a whole lot else. It took a long time to get to where we are now and let's face it, we've got it pretty good.

But times they change. The last few years has seen far too many of us accepting an image on a tiny screen as the best we're going to get—worse still, it seems to be good enough.

Let's make up an artist name for the sake of argument. His name is Johnny Appleseed (I have no idea where that came from, it

might be a comic book character from the seventies) and he's tattooing the best he ever has. Great. Tattoo complete, out comes the phone—SNAP—five seconds later, it's on instagram, Facebook, twitter (you know the drill) and the public go to work:

"Fuck yeah, man! Best tattoo ever!"

"Man those colours pop!"

"Great work brother!"

There's usually a lot more exclamation marks than I've added here but you have to draw the line somewhere.

Two very literal seconds later, 'the public' are busy looking at something else. In an hour, that 'best tattoo ever' will be forgotten about and/or replaced with the 'next best tattoo ever'. If you sat everybody down and asked them to make a list of all the tattoos

There was a time when getting a tattoo amounted to the boundaries of your home town—that's the truth for the majority of us



Richard Barclay



Luke Rudden



Piotr Błaskiewicz



Beau Redman



Lukasz Sokolowski

they had seen today, I'd venture they'd be hard pushed to name most of them.

That's looking but not seeing. That's a first draft world right there. It's become normal for far too many people—and I don't like it. Not because it's lazy (well, maybe a little bit) but because there's no time spent on the actual critical appreciation.

Then again, doing such a thing pretty much broke Nikko Hurtado. Check out his website (nikkohurtado.com) this is what it says:

"After just a year of tattooing Nikko did a tattoo that would change his career forever – a Batman colour portrait. This was his first colour portrait that he ever attempted and when it was complete the client entered it into the Pomona Tattoo Portrait Contest and took home First Place. It would be one of many awards he would collect over the years, but that portrait put him on the map. The

image went viral in the tattoo community before there was even Facebook, Instagram, and social media. He was now known as the go-to artist for colour portraits."

As he says himself here—this was before the internet was swamped with every man/woman/beast who ever held a machine—the world of today is not the same world in which Nikko broke out. What I'm trying to get across here is that a tattoo is so more than a product to be revved up and appreciated like a pair of shoes you might put in your shopping cart. It's art. It's what we've been telling ourselves and everybody else for years now.



Gary Fairclough



Beau Redman



It took a long time to get to where we are now and let's face it, we've got it pretty good

As hardcore fans of the medium, collectively, we should be looking *and* seeing what passes in front of us because without some kind of filter being applied and utilised wherever possible, everything is 'fantastic' and that leads to X-Factor auditions: you know the ones I'm talking about—the entrants whereby their parents and friends have told them how great they are and pushed them forwards only to be met in the real world with a very harsh reality. Sadly, with tattooing, it's leaving a permanent scar on the face of an industry that's collectively worked really hard to raise its game.

I don't have any answers—and I know nobody particularly asked the question in the first place—but two bad things are happening out there and we don't seem particularly concerned about it. The first is that over 90% of artists are entrusting their entire careers to faith. Faith that Instagram (or whatever) will always be around. Remember MySpace? I do. The second is that over 90% of customers/fans (again, or whatever you want to be



Hova

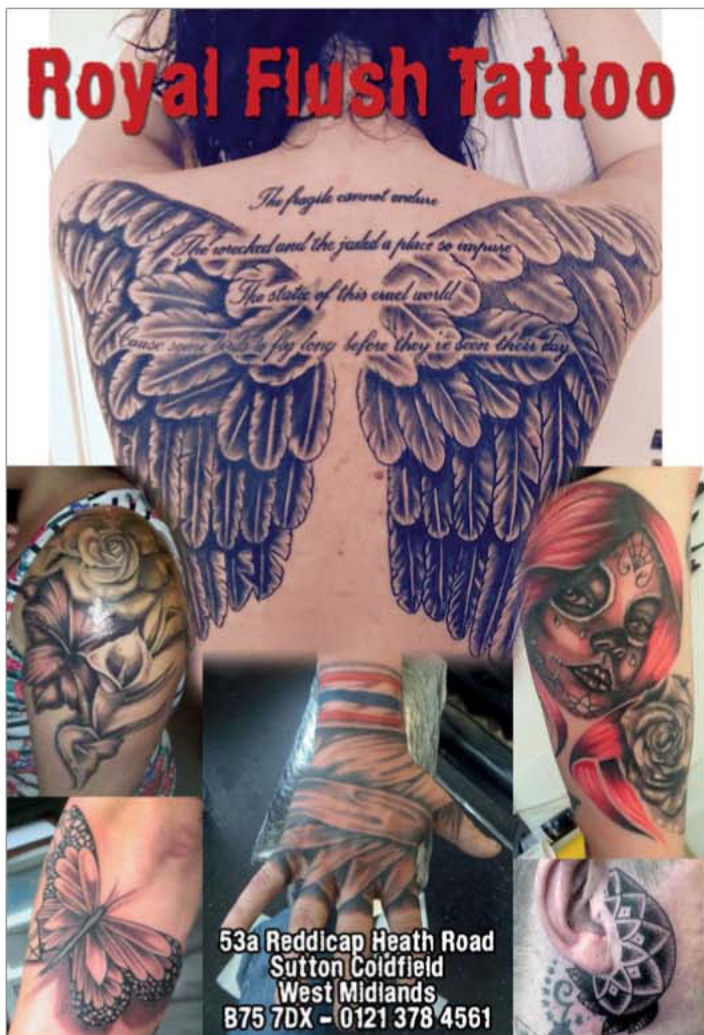
called) are fine with this scenario. It's this second 90% that are propping up the first 90%. It's like a brilliant occult version of Jenga.

The biggest thing for me however is how transitory it all is. In our world of permanence, I find it odd that too many of us have never considered exactly how temporary the web can be. Sure, it's a cultural thing of the current moment, but have you ever gone into a junk shop and found a magazine or book from 1977 and discovered a whole world you didn't even know existed? That ain't gonna happen with an online page 12 months from now—certainly not in the same way.

So there you have it. Stupid questions that nobody asked followed by vapid answers nobody asked for... but it's a good point. Isn't it? ▣

Footnote: Johnny Appleseed: aka John Chapman, was an American pioneer nurseryman who introduced apple trees to large parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, as well as the northern counties of present day West Virginia. As far as I can tell, he did not tattoo nor was he tattooed. Similarity to any human being alive or dead is purely coincidental (etc... you know the drill).

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Andy Walker

BEHIND THE INK

NEW SCHOOL

What makes a tattoo artist tick? Wayne Simmons continues his Behind The Ink series, unpacking the pieces that make up some of his favourite tattooists working today, looking in particular at the non-tattoo art that inspires them. This month, he's talking to Cathy Sue and Andy Walker, who work mostly with new school. So, obviously they're frustrated graffiti artists, right?

People always ask me about graffiti and assume that I do it,' Andy laughs. 'The truth is I've never even held a spray can! I think people hear graffiti and automatically think new school, but graffiti just means to draw on a surface in a public place; it really can be any style.' Fair point. That said, Andy is still a big fan of graffiti art, especially the more contemporary stuff doing the rounds. 'I think it's evolved a lot. You only have to look at the work of guys like Smug, throwing realistic colour portraits on the sides of full buildings, to know that the days of bubble writing are long gone. Hopefully one day Niorkz will show me the way around a spray can, as I'd love to have a go.'



Andy Walker

Niorkz, in case you didn't know, is one of three artists working alongside Andy at Creative Vandals, the studio in Hull he co-owns with Mat Lapping. Dane Grannon and Nick Cobley make up the team, all great artists in their own right, but it was Mat who Andy apprenticed under back in 2009 when he started out. Even then, Andy was working mostly in what he himself describes as a 'cartoon style' so it was a given that he'd be drawn to new school. 'As an apprentice, I looked up to Tony Ciavarro and Jime Litwalk. Tattooing pieces from their sketchbooks and obviously having Mat as a mentor was a huge help.' He thinks new school in particular encourages freedom of expression on the artist's

Cathy Sue: www.facebook.com/cathysuetattoo www.instagram.com/cathy_sue
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Andy Walker

part. 'There are no boundaries. Drawing your own designs means that you get to do whatever you want. The more I stopped trying to draw like other people the easier it was to find my own style.'

Cathy Sue agrees. A comic book obsessed art student, specialising in Illustration, she apprenticed under Jon Reynolds in Buckley who showed her how to inject some of that art school passion into tattooing and hone her own style. 'Bright, bold colours attract me like a moth to a flame. New school pieces stood out and I found myself drawing more and more in that style. The thing I love best is the complete lack of limitations. You can literally just pluck something from your imagination and

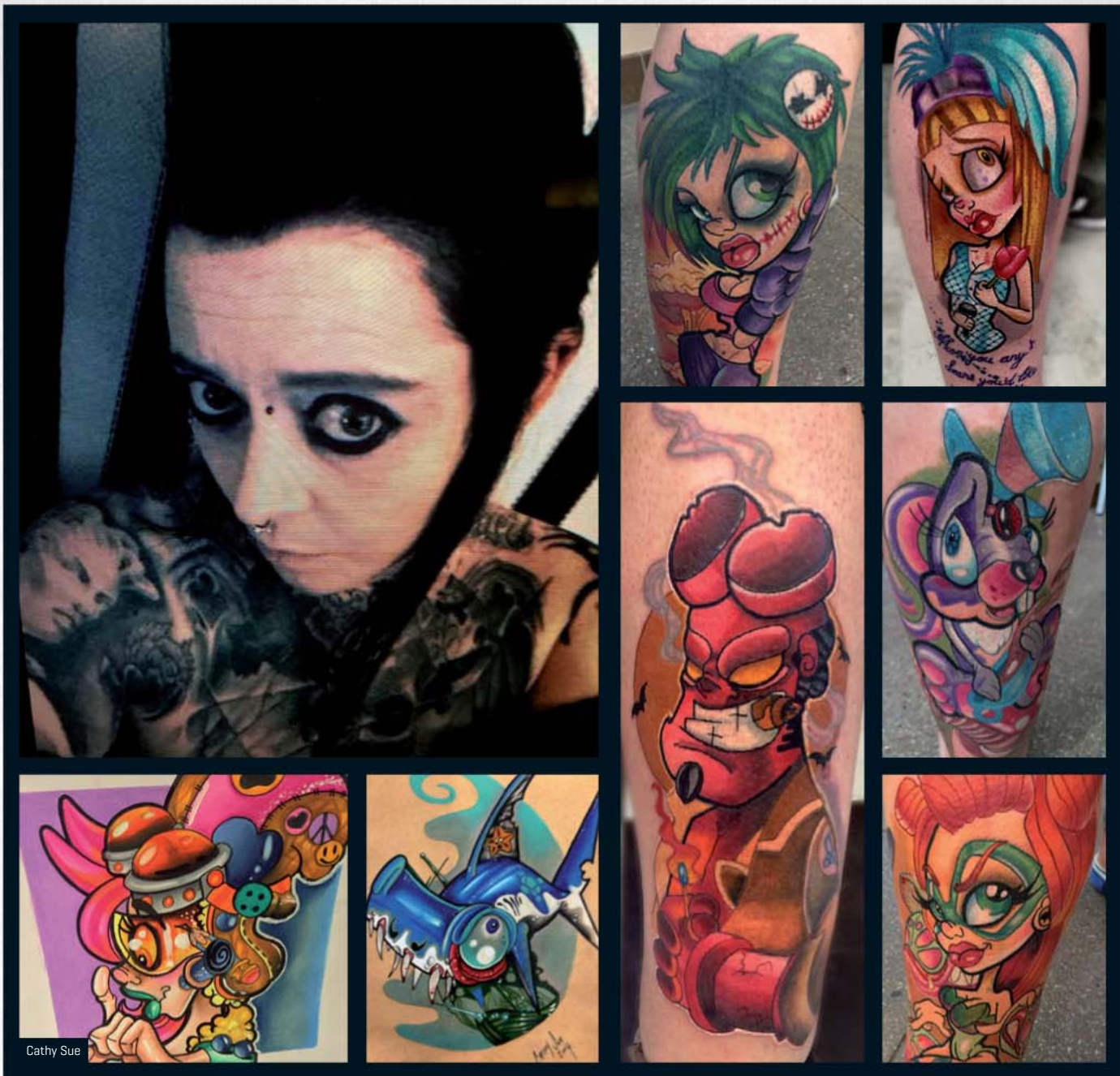
THE MORE I STOPPED TRYING TO DRAW LIKE OTHER PEOPLE THE EASIER IT WAS TO FIND MY OWN STYLE

ANDY WALKER

put it on paper or skin. You create something new and fresh just by thinking about it.'

Today, Cathy works out of her own studio, Dexterity Ink, in Wrexham North Wales. She continues to be inspired by comic books, Matt Dixon and J. Scott

Campbell's work in particular impressing her. She's also a fan of surrealism: Dali, of course, as well as Hieronymus Bosch. 'It's the whole imaginative aspect that intrigues me. It's like taking a peek into someone else's head.' Like Andy, Cathy goes against the grain with the graffiti/ new school cliché although she reckons that the two art forms are good bedfellows, so to speak. 'I think graffiti can influence the new school style in



a lot of ways: the manipulation of perspective and the bright colours are certainly traits they both share in common.'

Similar could be said of neo-trad, of course, a relatively new (and increasingly popular) style to hit the tattoo scene. Like new school, neo-trad evolved out of traditional old school tattooing, throwing in a little realism, perhaps, where new school threw in graffiti. I wonder then if the neo-trad craze has wooed potential new school customers away. Andy doesn't think so. In his experience, the discerning tattoo collector doesn't just want one style or another, they want a little of everything. 'These days, customers are a lot more savvy. They tend to know what they

**IT'S THE WHOLE
IMAGINATIVE ASPECT
THAT INTRIGUES ME.
IT'S LIKE TAKING A
PEEK INTO SOMEONE
ELSE'S HEAD**

CATHY SUE

want and who they want it done by, so chances are if they want neo-trad they would already have another artist in mind. I tattoo a lot of people who have bookings lined up with other artists as they know that I'm probably not the guy for a realistic portrait or Chicano script.'

Cathy agrees. 'I really don't think new school is any more or less popular than it was five years ago.' For her, it's the adaptability of the style that will always appeal; how it can be mixed in with just about anything to create something unique and contemporary. 'It always brings something new to the table. People are always looking for something different and that is certainly something which



Cathy Sue



new school offers.'

Andy has been mixing it up of late, himself, trying his hand at some comic book inspired pieces, subject matter he's really digging right now. Like Cathy, Andy's a J. Scott Campbell fan, and also cites Humberto Ramos' work as a big influence in that field. But when it comes to how much of his own style he blends in, it's the customer who gets the final say. 'When people ask me for a comic book tattoo, I ask how they want to do it. If they want it in my style, they're going to get a very cartoony, bobble-eyed version, whereas if they want the more traditional style, I will reference work from original comics.'

**IT ALWAYS BRINGS
SOMETHING NEW TO
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DIFFERENT AND
THAT IS CERTAINLY
SOMETHING WHICH
NEW SCHOOL OFFERS**

CATHY SUE

For Cathy, gathering reference is a pretty informal process. Her natural style has an almost burlesque, pin-up vibe, but she's open to doing just about anything. 'It really depends on the subject matter,' she offers. 'If it is, say, a pet caricature you want, then a good clear photo is always a great help. Otherwise, just let me know what's on your mind.'

So, there you have it. You might not see either of these two shaking a can around your neighbourhood any time soon. Graffiti artists they ain't. Either way, looking at the photos we've printed, I'm sure you'll agree that the writing's not on the wall for new school just yet. ▣

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YOUNG

PARISIANS

There is lots of amazing tattoo work coming out of France right now. One of these ink pioneers is Niko Inko, working from a studio just outside Paris. His beautiful style combines intricate black outlines with graphic splashes of colour that juxtapose contrasting elements of avant-garde and realism

Words: Nicky Connor · Images: Niko Inko





Outside the crazy world of tattooing, Niko enjoys pretty much the quiet life. His passion for tattooing and drawing the designs, takes a really big part of his life and time, but when he can he likes to take time off for traveling. He has just become a dad and so likes to spend time with his family, walking and hanging out at the beach. He also enjoys sharing a good glass of wine, partying with friends and snowboarding. He listens to a lot of different kinds of music, but he prefers acoustic, folk, funk and world sounds, "something spiritual and true".

Now I have a bit of a soft spot for avant-garde tattoos, but what I really love about Niko's work is not only the scale of his designs—"it goes without saying: no catalog, no pattern, no mini tattoo", it is also the beautiful movement and detail! They combine shapes, textures and patterns that move beyond a mere tattoo and tell a dynamic vivid story or as Niko likes to put it, "I have the strange habit of trying to keep my designs permanently on people."

Being a bit of a mixologist in his approach Niko likes to experiment with different tattoo styles in his work, to explore both the aesthetic outcome and understand the tattooing process. Tattooing for six years now he has worked hard and built his skills, in addition to producing both accurate, precise lines and patterns he also feels he now knows his own work. Reflecting on what he enjoys and what



he finds challenging, this understanding allows him to now reflect on his work and his own unique style. This was a luxury he did not have time for when he started tattooing, for both inking and drawing at the same time, left little time for self reflection: "I didn't have my own style before discovering it," is how he likes to explain it.

Niko differs from some artists as he enjoys working in many different styles. Some of his favourites are realism, watercolour, abstract and avant-garde. He enjoys mixing them all together, which he feels then creates his own style.

"I work in different styles. I get bored easily and for that reason I love to work every day in a different style."

He is passionate about his work and is constantly researching and developing ideas, looking through magazines, videos, art and graffiti for inspiration. You can see how this eclectic mix of influences fuels his designs as his port-



folio boasts not only beautiful anatomically correct horses and figures but vast, sprawling geometric shapes. He strives to be constantly inventive in his work and enjoys the creative surprises and collisions that come with mixing different tattoo styles. These experiments keep him both motivated and inspired.

"I try to break my limits all the time. If I work in the same style for more than a month, I enter a kind of crisis and I hate everything I do. So I always try to create something new and that leads me to other styles, and ways of seeing."

Another of Niko's main inspirations is his clients, their stories thoughts, ideas and the challenge of how to translate their creative plans and emotions onto their skin.

"It is also my job here, and perhaps above all I think, to tell in pictures what my clients tell me in words."

Like with most creative journeys, Niko's was not really a straight road, he never set out to be a tattoo artist. Although obviously having a natural talent for drawing he did not follow any artistic study in school and after leaving school he did a lot of different, weird and boring jobs. He then found himself working as a body piercer and that being in the tattoo shop re-sparked his interest in art. He realised that maybe by training as a tattooist he

"THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT, DOING THIS JOB, I LOVE SEEING MY CREATIONS WALKING ABOUT, SHOPPING, AND NEVER DISAPPEARING"

could follow his artistic passion and make a living. Then back in 2009 he had a chance for this idea to become a reality, when another local tattooist saw his drawings and offered him an apprenticeship. Once Niko started his training he found the whole learning process a real artistic revelation and more creative than he ever thought.

In the beginning he started out tattooing friends and gradually built his skills to a point he became confident in his trade. Developing his own style was an organic self-directed process without being heavily influenced by a mentor. He feels he learnt mostly by observing other artist's techniques and styles. Step by step, Niko gradually built up his skill set and found the confidence to do something new with his tattoos and really enjoyed the journey. Now he produces his own brand of outstanding work combining detailed kinetic sketches with washes of vivid colour and geometric patterns. He builds his



"I WORK IN DIFFERENT STYLES. I GET BORED EASILY AND FOR THAT REASON I LOVE TO WORK EVERYDAY IN A DIFFERENT STYLE"



designs with different media including collage, paints and computer to bring his sketches to life before transferring them to skin.

"There is no doubt that, doing this job, I love seeing my creations walking about, shopping, and never disappearing."

Currently working at the Belly Button Tattoo Shop, a private studio, owned by the famous French tattooist Belly. The space is run as an appointment only studio and is shared by four artists, Aurelio and L'Oiseau in addition to Niko and Belly. The shop is located in Perpignan in southern France at the bottom of the Pyrenees mountains.

The town has a rich history that mixes both French and Spanish culture due to it's 'Catalan' heritage. Dali is one of Perpignan's famous admirers who is said to have called the city 'the centre of the world'. Perpignan is a brightly coloured and multicultural town with influences from France, South Africa and Spain. It boasts many historical sights in addition to the thriving tattoo culture.

Niko as lots of other artists who's work he admires, for example, Kofi, Belly Button, Jef Palumbo, Kostek, Dmitriy Samohin and Nikko Hurtado. But if he could create a top three Niko would choose Léa Nahon, for his beautiful



graphic style, who Niko say's "is really insane and such a good person". Jeff Gogue with his beautiful, colourful, realism work, that Niko feels leads him

to question his own work and how far he could push his own talent. Finally, at number one there is Xoil, for who Niko uses the word 'un-reachable' to describe his technical level.

To finish our chat, I wanted to ask Niko where he gets his inspiration, though I guess having just become a father, his new arrival is probably top of the list right now. Like many creative people, Niko says he finds inspiration in most things alongside of the everyday. He likes using Pinterest to collect ideas, as he feels it can create a good illustration of what happens in his mind when he is creating, but he see things everywhere. At the movies, in a museum, on the internet, on a piece of paper, on an advert, an art concept or a video game.

"I will have in mind, a colour, an idea, a way of constructing, a theme or a symbol. This at some point this will mix with another idea without any reason or relation reason and create another idea. My mind is real chaos." ■



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Japan Inc.

Because being tattooed by Japanese artist Horishin, who studied under tebori master and fellow Gomineko Crew member Horimasa before opening his own studio in Gunma, wasn't cool enough, I had the chance to do my first interview in a foreign language. Here we go...

www.capsule-tattoo.com www.gominekobooks.com

You're most likely expecting this story to take place in Japan, but nothing is ever as it seems, now is it? In reality, it has its roots in my Canadian hometown, over 5,000 miles away. You see, it was during the 12th annual Art Tattoo Montreal convention that I first saw the jaw-dropping art of the Gomineko Crew and discovered Gomineko Books.

Founded in Tokyo in 2000 by Texan transplant Crystal Morey, Gomineko Books has become a leading source of Japanese tattoo art and design books, as well as unique tomes published by Gomineko Press. When she's not busy pursuing her love of literature, Morey can be found hosting custom tours around Japan, giving seminars and attending conventions worldwide with the Gomineko Crew.

If that name doesn't ring a bell, simply look up one of these three artists and get ready to be thoroughly impressed. Horimasa, based in Gunma, and Horiken Syodai, owner of Spirited Skin Tattoo Studio



When it comes to tattooing, Horimasa has taught me to have a more serious attitude

Needless to say, a chat was necessary, with some translation help from Crystal because, well, my Japanese lessons have yet to pay off.

in Shizuoka, are both tebori masters specializing in wabori i.e. traditional Japanese motifs. Meanwhile, Horishin, who owns Capsule Tattoo in Gunma, studied under Horimasa and now tattoos stunning wabori designs using both tebori and modern-day machines.

Back to Montreal and my meeting with Horishin: I knew I wanted to be tattooed by him no matter what, but that's about as far as my thought process had gone. Clearly, I was any artist's dream customer—not.

What started out as an idea for a blowfish eventually evolved into a goldfish rocking a kimono and three hours later, I had the most intricate, delicate, beautiful tattoo I had ever seen. All that with only a simple marker outline to start and a quick Google search to pin down the proper hues for a goldfish.



"When I became his apprentice, he told me that I must" always be thinking about tattoos, and always have thoughts about tattoos on my mind."

Gunma, Japan

Gunma is found in the center of Japan, about an hour from Tokyo, and is one of eight landlocked prefectures in the country. It boasts beautiful mountain ranges, national parks and 200 onsen i.e. hot springs.

Do you remember the first time you came face to face with a tattoo?

The first time I saw a tattoo was when I was 16 years old. I had the chance to see the work of a tattoo artist who had come on a business trip up close, and I remember it had a great impact on me. I was attracted to the power of tattoos, but it wasn't possible for me to get tattooed at the time because I was a minor.

Most people would simply go on to become collectors, but you took things a step further in learning how to tattoo first-hand. What sparked that decision?

When I eventually got my first tattoo at the age of 23, I watched the tattoo artist work as the tattoo was being done, and I thought to myself that tattooing looked like a lot of fun. I knew then that I wanted to become a tattoo artist and with each new tattoo I got, the idea of becoming a tattoo artist grew stronger.

How did you and Horimasa meet?

I was introduced to Horimasa

through a mutual acquaintance and after taking the time to meet with me, he agreed to take me on as his apprentice.

Is that when you crossed paths with Crystal, too?

The first time I met Crystal was when I was introduced to her at Horimasa's studio. After meeting her several more times in various locations, and even participating in overseas conventions together, I became a part of Gomineko Crew.

What has been the greatest lesson you've taken away from Horimasa to date?

When it comes to tattooing, Horimasa has taught me to have a more serious attitude. Of course, he has taught me about technique, but he has also taught me the importance of drawing, making sure you are using the correct materials, reading, and having an inquiring mind overall.

When I became his apprentice, he told me that I must "always be thinking about tattoos, and always have thoughts about tattoos on my mind." From that moment on, I have never stopped thinking about tattoos.

You tattoo with a modern-day machine, but also practice tebori. Did you always know you wanted to do both?

At first I thought it would be fine to just tattoo with a machine, but when I watched Horimasa using the tebori, I thought it looked difficult, but fun too. When I first started tebori, it was, in fact, very difficult.

One of the main differences between machine and tebori tattooing is the reaction of the skin





and the ink. I like to work with both the machine and tebori, so I try to find a balance between the two as I work towards creating better tattoos.

Talk to me about your studio, Capsule Tattoo...

After training under Horimasa for four years, I got permission to tattoo independently and opened Capsule Tattoo. At that time, I had no intention of working at another tattoo studio!

Capsule Tattoo is located in the suburbs of Gunma Prefecture. It is a calm place where I can concentrate on my work because of the peace and quiet that surrounds me.

I follow you on Instagram and it looks like you really love travelling, especially for work. Of all the places you've been, do you have a favorite?

I don't have a favourite location. Every country I've visited so far has given me a fresh and stimulating impression. Even when I visit the same location more than once for conventions, I always feel like there's something new to learn, and that will never change. That being said, I would also like to participate in a convention somewhere I haven't been before.

With tattoos becoming increasingly popular and more widely accepted all over the world, I'm curious what tattoo culture is like in Japan...

In Japan, tattoos are becoming fashionable, but I

When I watched Horimasa using the tebori, I thought it looked difficult, but fun too. When I first started tebori, it was, in fact, very difficult

~~feel that there are many people who still have~~ a negative view when it comes to tattoos. However, I believe that Japanese tattoos are one of the traditional arts that Japan can be proud of.

If we visited you in Gunma for a day, what would we absolutely have to see and do?

The daruma and the onsen hot springs are pretty famous in the part of Gunma that I live in. If you were to visit here, I would recommend you take a daruma-making workshop and then soak away the day's exhaustion in an onsen.

Tebori

Tebori translates into 'hand-carved' and refers to the traditional Japanese form of tattooing in which a sharpened bamboo stick (called a nomi) is used to insert ink under skin. It is believed to have first made an appearance in 10,000BC when tattooing was used for both spiritual and decorative purposes.

I'm currently studying Japanese. Can you teach me five words everyone should know?

Some words and phrases that the Japanese use on a daily basis are "Konnichiwa" (Hello), "Ohayo-gozaïmasu" (Good morning), "Arigato-gozaïmasu" (Thank you), "Oyasuminasai" (Goodnight) and "Tomodachi" (Friends). I think it's good advice to remember these.





I listen to a lot of podcasts and books on tape and spend a lot of time at home buried in books. Heaven!

Wabori

Wabori is the word used to describe traditional Japanese designs, which strive to tell one cohesive story or portray one specific subject matter. Images include everything from mythical creatures to religious icons and make for some of the most stunning tattoos in the world.

Finish this sentence, please: "Horishin is..."

Horishin is completely devoted to developing his skills as a tattooer.

Before parting ways, it was time to subject Crystal to some rapid-fire questions, too. Only fair, right?

What brought you over to Japan and, on that note, what made you stay?

I moved 19 years ago when my daughter was eight months old because I wanted her to learn Japanese. Children exposed to second languages at an early age pick them up easily and this is a talent I felt would serve her well later in life. I planned to stay two or three years, but just never left! It's far too fascinating a country. It's incredibly safe—crime is minimal—and incredibly random and unpredictable. Both qualities I find compelling as far as a home base.

How did you get into selling books?

I am a book collector and started selling art books on eBay because I figured if I enjoyed what I discovered, then other people would as well. That led to people like Luke Atkinson and Josh Roelink reaching out and asking me to hunt up

certain artists and imagery and it set me on the path to what Gomineko Books is today.

Is Gomineko Books responsible for the creation of the Gomineko Crew?

The Gomineko Crew was Horimasa's idea. We were all joking around one convention about a crew name since we travel together so much and a little later he shot me a photo of his hand with Gomineko Crew tattooed on it. Owen Williams made us a logo and we extended the crew to include our friends and colleagues worldwide.

You're also offering tours around Japan these days, is that right?

The tours really came because so many friends and clients wanted to visit that I couldn't afford or find time to properly show them everything I wanted in Japan. So I have groups come together, charge them, and use the cash to hire seminars and workshops for them to make the trips unforgettable.

What does a typical day in the life of Crystal look like?

I work a lot. I love everything I do. I also get a toooooon of emails asking for references or about imagery. I'm up at 6, coffee and emails till 11, walk the dog, ship books or go hunt for more. Then home, make dinner for Natalia, walk dog, research for seminars or plan tours, answer emails and start boxing up books for the next day until 2 or 3. I listen to a lot of podcasts and books on tape and spend a lot of time at home buried in books. Heaven! ▣

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The Great British Tattoo Show

London is always a hotbed of activity when it comes to expecting the unexpected. More than any of our other shows, The Great British Tattoo Show always turfs up the unexpected and this year was certainly no exception.

There's a certain majesty to the building that plays host to the Great British Tattoo Show. If you happen to take the time to walk around the whole of the outside perimeter of Alexandra Palace, you'll find the front entrance and halls welcoming and awe inspiring slick. Keep walking and you'll discover the other side of the building is not quite so well maintained.

Decommissioned, abandoned and mostly forgotten about (unless you choose to look) this hidden side of the building that once held grand balls and horse racing, birthed the BBC and had its own train station is now, for all intents and purposes, dead to the world. They even killed off Tom Baker's Doctor Who here.

If you play with the analogy enough, Alexandra Palace has a lot in common with tattooing and I kinda like that. This is the third year the show has been resident in this slot and



ALEXANDRA PALACE HAS A LOT IN COMMON WITH TATTOOING. SOMETIMES, IT'S GOOD TO BE REMINDED WE ARE ALL STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS AROUND HERE

I've made the same trip around the building every single time. It never changes but sometimes, it's good enough to be reminded we are all standing on the shoulders of giants around here—particularly when the new giants tend to be younger, sexier and smarter because they learned from the mistakes of the old giants.

As to be expected, it's good to catch up with old friends. It was good to see Lionel Fahy again for sure—he's great for a verbal sparring match. I have since dubbed him a 'visual scientist' due to his quest to push the boundaries of what people will actually accept as being a

tattoo. I'm a big lover of his work. There's a certain skill to his art that far too many still aren't taking the time to understand. Oddly, I think he likes it that way.

Also on the 'very pleased to see' list were the inimitable Bernd Muss and the equally inimitable Jondix—the work coming out of both of those studios is more than wonder-

I HAVE SINCE DUBBED LIONEL A 'VISUAL SCIENTIST' DUE TO HIS QUEST TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT PEOPLE WILL ACTUALLY ACCEPT AS BEING A TATTOO

ful. From the prints for sale to the depth of creativity when it comes to laying ink in skin, I would go so far as to say these two guys are probably among the best in the world right now. You can quote me on that.

No mention of the artists making a serious trip to the show would be complete without an extreme nod of the head to Matt Curzon who not only puts out great tattoos every single time but also created the design that appeared on the posters, t-shirts and most importantly, the awards. If Carlsberg made awards, this is what they would look like. Absolutely my favourite looking award in at least a couple of years.

Even though we love shipping in artists who don't live on this fair isle, there's a massive amount of incredible talent sitting right here on our doorstep too. There's more than a few names to watch out for in the coming years that's for sure—assuming they continue as they have been for the last twelve months. Craig Cardwell is becoming a heavy favourite out there and Sonny Mitchell continues to push out some of the finest realistic portraits too. Both of these guys need challenging hard because there's no way on earth we have seen the best of them. Chantale Coady—who also won Best of Saturday—is also proving herself to be one of the vertebrae in the spine of the female tattooing population. (I would love to retract the 'female' from that statement but it appears to be important to people for some reason. Let me know when tattoo artists can simply be great/good/bad regardless of sex and I'll be ten steps ahead of you).

On the raised eyebrow front, Liisa Addi from Estonia walked home with Best of Sunday and also Best of Show. It was her first convention and being able to hand over awards like that is the best of times, going to prove to all newcomers that hard work and talent really are all you need to start making a name for yourself. Simply a great tattoo all round and totally deserved.

Another name that I've been seeing mentioned more often for a while now but never sat down to thoroughly inspect the goods is Mowgli at OhhMyGod. If you like your art to transcend four or five dimensions at a time, there's gold in his hills.

An interesting aside to the show this year was a couple of journalists turning up from The Sun digging really deep into what makes the tattoo world tick. It's tempting to brush it off as being 'just The Sun', but they came armed with huge spades and empty bags to fill with interest. Asking all the right questions, it was a genuine pleasure to fill them in on the inner workings of 'why'—quite possibly, this was the first time in five years I've taken part in something for the mainstream press I have genuine hope that the result on the other side will help people understand what good art is and why we are all so incredibly different when it comes to choosing that art. As an even bigger aside, on the Sunday morning of the show, the Daily Mail ran a 'most read story of the day' online that was incredibly posi-





Things noticed this year:

- Lines are getting thicker, straighter and stronger. They're also getting more delicate where necessary. All this is a good thing.
- Artists are getting smart with white and also with negative space. It's good to see artists increased understanding of what not to do—it hasn't always been that way.
- Breaking Bad portraits are not as popular as they were last year but Jack Sparrow never seems to go out of vogue. Game of Thrones is catching up but not a single Arrow or Flash tattoo? They will come.
- Prediction for next twelve months: dotwork will explode. All dotwork artists are created equal but some dotwork artists are more equal than others. [That's an Animal Farm gag].



IF I HAD SECRET AWARDS IN MY POCKET FOR SUCH OCCASIONS, I WOULD HAVE HANDED THEM TO ALL THREE. THOSE TWENTY MINUTES CHANGED THE FUTURE FACE OF JUDGING FOR ME.

SATURDAY AWARDS

Best Colour

Anastasia Vilks of Vilks Tattoo Studio

Best Oriental

Tseng Yu-Chieh of Shen Yan Tattoo

Best Blackwork

Glenn Cuzen of Top Gun Tattooing

Best Avant Garde

Mowgli of Ohh My God Studio

Best of Saturday

Chantale Coody of Picture House Tattoo

SUNDAY AWARDS

Best Black & Grey

Vee Takaloo of Skin Kitchen

Best Portrait

Sam Butler of Vintage Inx

Best Realism

Anastasia Vilks of Vilks Tattoo

Best of Sunday

Liisa Addi of Mamas Pride Tattoo

Best of Convention

Liisa Addi of Mamas Pride Tattoo

tive—maybe we're collectively finally getting somewhere with what we have to say.

I've visited a lot of shows over the years and sat on the judging panel of more than just our own shows too. This one turned up some peaches with cream. Most telling of all were the entrants into the Oriental category. I've seen good and bad work show its face when we usually do this, but at this show, I saw Great Work. Great Work that shut my mouth with a rattle and set a standard that's going to be hard to beat as we go forward.

Faced off with three very large back-pieces in quick succession, you begin to realise there's a) getting a tattoo, b) being tattooed, c) being a collector and then, d) there is committing to this. The time, the care, the history, the rules, the colour, the placement, the scale... I could probably create a list of twenty items 99% of people never even think about here. Having never been put in a position before in which all the correct boxes were ticked, we (that would be Trent and myself) were left in the odd position of having to choose which we personally liked best rather

than which one 'was' the best. Is it possible they could all be the best? I guess it is – I guess that's why judging is done by people who see more tattoos than anybody else on a daily basis than anybody else in the building.

"I really like the one with horse as the main feature. The blues were knockout."

"You took the words out of my mouth."

Decision made. Tough call though. If I had secret awards in my pocket for such occasions, I would have handed them to all three. Those twenty minutes changed the future face of judging for me.

You can never have the shoulders of too many giants to stand on when you're looking for gold. I can honestly say, hand on heart as an observing party and not speaking as a member of the team that puts it together, this show is getting seriously hot.

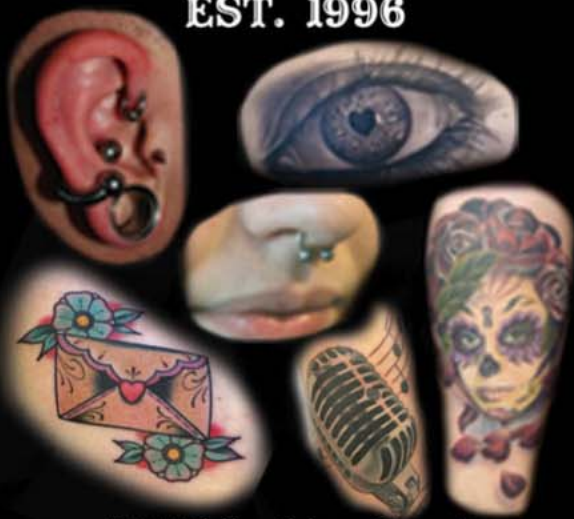
Next stop? The mighty Tattoo Jam in its new (or reclaimed) summer spot is only ten weeks away as I sit here and write this. If the mag is in your hands, probably more like eight weeks for you.

Fifty six days. Bring it. ☐

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Published by Taschen.



For a man who, if time had been somewhat kinder to him, would have been 750 years old today (or thereabouts), Durante degli Alighieri is something of a hero to me but most definitely not in the same way a lot of my heroes are - and likely never will be.

To begin with, it's likely you know him better simply as Dante. Most people who went to school for at least one day in their lives will have heard of his book *Divine Comedy*, but it's also very likely you've never picked it up or even looked at it. Not coincidentally, William Blake is one of my other literary heroes—and that all stems from the drawings he 'roughed up' for *Divine Comedy* that captivated me back when I was young and impressionable.

The basic concept of *Divine Comedy* runs thus: Dante, in his middle age, finds he has lost his way and at the request of Beatrice, (likely an unrequited love from his life), the Roman poet Virgil goes in search of him. Virgil finds Dante in the woods on Good Friday in the year 1300 and together they begin their journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise to find God. I don't think it would be a huge spoiler if I reveal that Virgil gets replaced by Beatrice for the last leg of the quest—everybody knows there are certain places Pagan's aren't allowed to tread.

Amazingly, the whole journey takes just three days.

So far so good, but this book from Taschen—this monstrous, divine in itself, outrageously most beautiful book I have in my collection (and have ever owned)—is more about Blake than it is Dante, and yet, for all its epic classicalism, *Divine Comedy* without Blake is only half the book it should be. By my estimation, that means that for roughly 650 years, readers of the classic tale really lucked out on some magic.

Whilst his work on *Divine Comedy* is not Blake's only undertaking, it is (arguably, I reluctantly suppose) easily his best. The collection ranges from drawings that began around 1824 and run to 1827 when Blake died, leaving only a few completed watercolours of a proposed 102 and some large engraved plates based on seven designs. These were also left incomplete at his death.

The reason for including the book here, is not simply because it's a classic but more because



in a period of time in which tattooing needs to start looking at some subject matter other than lazily glancing over at what other tattooists are doing on instagram, it's an important book to use not only as reference but also as a great yardstick of what's possible when you throw all of the rules out of the window.

With 324 cloth bound pages and 14 fold out spreads, this is so much more than a simple 'art book'—it's actually something of an experience. If you can get into it and lose yourself in what's going on, what you should find is the hive mind of Dante and Blake working together, hundreds of years apart, to create something that neither of them intended this story to be.

To wrap up: All writers sit in Dante's shadow when it comes to relaying simple concepts of great importance. Blake on the other hand, makes all artists who followed him seem lacking in their understanding of the workings of the world and of what goes on behind the curtain.

And then there's Taschen, who put all other art publishers to shame on a grand scale.

My work here is complete. ▣



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TIME MACHINE

After attending the European congress for tattoo pigments last month, thought it best to write about what we're putting in our bodies and the hazards that may arise from these ingredients

A few months ago there was a lot of attention being given to Alex Falkenahm, a student at Halifax university in Nova Scotia who has created a cream for tattoo removal that is pain free and inexpensive. If you've read my other columns, you'll know I'm 'pro light' as to chemicals for removal but if you put your ear close to page you'll hear a very slow slurp of me extracting my foot from my mouth. Reason being is he seems to have created an elixir that tricks your body into releasing the particles naturally as opposed to destructive forces, such as lasers, breaking the particles down for your body to metabolise. I'm bringing this up not because of his genius, which he is if this really works with no side effects, but because of the release of chemicals which we expect our bodies to handle with no idea of the long term consequences. Even when we got the tattoos we have, do you know what's in these inks? The secretive nature of ink production is for obvious competition reasons and although they have the best intentions of not poisoning us, no one knows the long term effects on our health and what affects one, may not affect the rest.

With an ever increasing list of people reacting negatively to certain ingredients, how safe are we when breaking ink particles down? The answer is no one really knows. With some flash points of sub-atomical explosions occurring under the skin at 800 degrees Celsius when lasering, are we changing the chemical composition of the inks? Do the inks we use already have carcinogenic factors? Answer yes to both. The real question is, what long term adverse reactions may crop up? No one knows.

Studies have shown that black tattoos can delay the onset of skin cancer but not cause it because of the refractive nature of the colour on UV light, yet some believe the ingredients alone could have cancer causing factors we're all so concerned about. When dealing with colour inks and the properties of those ingredients, once again, we don't know the long term effects. Some scientists are saying that studies of tattoo pigments being linked to cancer are coincidence and others are say-



WAYNE JOYCE
ResetRoom

ing there's a direct link. Who to believe? The results from studies still remain highly controversial. With an increase in people getting metal allergies in this day and age, is it safe to even get tattooed? Let's say, for example, you have a nickel allergy and decide to get tattooed. What should you look out for? Obvious response is to avoid colours but there's even nickel in blacks. So what to do? Risk it and see? Not a good idea. Even an ink patch test can't tell you the long term risks unless you're willing to wait 6-8 years to see the response before getting your tattoo. It's unrealistic.

The fact remains that we're all taking huge risks and will only have the answers to these questions in the future when more studies have been published. But be under no illusion that these studies are not being done as much as we think. Even with the way the powers that be test and decide whether an ink is safe for humans, is unreliable. The way inks are tested for safety, produces incorrect info that is irrelevant to the health of its intended recipients. Why do I say this, because a scientist told me. When there's a heading that begins with 'scientists....', we automatically take it as gospel but look a little deeper and it's obvious, even they don't know what we're doing to ourselves.

I think the best thing we can do, is be prepared for the worst but hope for best. We are all taking risks and don't want seem like I'm scaremongering but we all need to take responsibility for our bodies and what we put them through.

I'll leave you with a quote from Donald Rumsfeld that is rather pertinent to how I'm feeling about what I've learned in the past few months "There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know." □

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AN EYE IS UPON YOU

ISOBEL

Once upon a time in the west, those that tattooed their entire bodies did so with the clearest of motivations, profit.

The circus exhibits of the 19th century were not art collectors, but opportunists, making a living in a manner too daring for most. Unafraid of the future, these bodily entrepreneurs cashed in on some of the many bizarre fascinations of Victorian era, medical abnormalities, folklore and foreignness. In a culture where even ankles were hidden at the behest of the monarch, those that displayed their flesh for the eyes of others were already imagined dangerous and the tattooed women of the circus doubled that danger. These bawdy bodies lured the public in like sirens, and they enjoyed their notoriety almost as much as they enjoyed the money

The likelihood of a tattooed bodysuit earning you a living seems remote now, and even tattoo-notoriety is scarce—the last of the great traditional sideshow exhibits, The Great Omi and Betty Broadbent had retired from the business by the 1960s and since then, despite a revival of the carny arts and a handful of high profile tattooed performers such as The Enigma, Katzen and Lizardman (and more recently, Lucky Diamond Rich and Zombie Boy) very few tattooed people have become known much beyond the alternative community.

Guinness World Record holder, Isobel Varley was perhaps only a household name in a special kind of household, but her face, or more accurately, her body, was world renowned. A media darling, pensioner Isobel's life and death were reported by the BBC, The Telegraph and The Huffington Post. Isobel was interviewed here in Skin Deep magazine almost 100 issues ago, the article giving an historical account of Isobel's tattoo journey, and forming a valuable record of the artists that contributed to Isobel's body suit, but the words are almost insignificant next to Isobel's photographs, her multicoloured skin a fitting vessel for her saucy spirit.

Contemporary culture values women for



PAULA HARDY KANGELOS
DiamondBetty

**CONTEMPORARY CULTURE
VALUES WOMEN FOR
THEIR BEAUTY, BUT THE
DEFINITION OF BEAUTY IS
THE ALSO THE DEFINITION
OF YOUTH...**

their beauty, but the definition of beauty is the also the definition of youth, and many older women report that ageing has made them feel almost invisible. Isobel didn't allow herself to disappear, she displayed and flaunted and exposed and while her motivations for becoming tattooed were not so clear as those of the circus tradition, she certainly made just as strong an impression.

I met Isobel only once, late on the last day of a tattoo convention, one of countless events worldwide that Isobel attended by special invitation. She was 70 years old, had been standing around in her bra for many hours and understandably, was cold and tired. The diminutive pensioner had covered her famous flesh with a fluffy cardigan, had



...AND MANY OLDER WOMEN REPORT THAT AGEING HAS MADE THEM FEEL ALMOST INVISIBLE.

slipped her wig on, and was wearing sensible shoes. So when I first made her acquaintance, Isobel didn't look much unlike many other women of her age. It wasn't long before the cardigan was hiked up and her bra was hiked down and she was pointing out particular tattoos, mostly erotic imagery, and laughing that special-to-Isobel cackle. At a tattoo show, surrounded by other tattooed people, Isobel was startling not for her ink, but for her unapologetic sexuality, her directness, her humour. Isobel's Guinness record was for 'Most Tattooed Senior Woman', but her age did not define her any more than her cardigan, or indeed, her tattoos, did. Married for more than 50 years, her husband, Malcolm described her as a strong personality, someone who would do whatever she pleased. He was amazed that Isobel had never received serious criticism, but she carried off her extreme appearance with aplomb, and is remembered by many for her kindness, as well as her ink.

In many ways, Isobel and I are opposites, she was born in the North, but settled in Hertfordshire, I was born in Herts, and live in the North. Isobel reportedly had her first tattoo at 49, I was 21, she left many of the design decisions in the hands of her chosen artists, instead declaring herself addicted to the process, and densely packed tattoos onto every inch of available skin. I enjoy choosing the subjects of my tattoos far more than I enjoy sitting for them, and my negative space, my bare skin, is almost as important as the tattoos.

Isobel achieved fame by showing her tattooed body off, I'm mostly known for writing about mine, and I'm hoping I'll be complete before I reach the age where Isobel started.

Philosophically, we're about as far apart as two tattooed women could possibly be, yet, whenever anyone asks, 'What will you look like when you are old?' I will think of the Internet image that poses the same question above a photograph of Isobel, and think 'Fabulous, darling'.

When we engaged in a game of 'you show me yours and I'll show you mine' Isobel was disappointed to find my tattoos more silly than sexy, so perhaps it's time to get a little bit of erotica in memory of the last of the truly great, inspirational tattooed ladies—but not on my forehead, unlike Isobel, I wouldn't dare.

Isobel Varley 1937–2014

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This month, as work continues on my second sleeve, I have been wondering if the novelty of getting a tattoo ever wears off...

In eight years I have gone from very my first tattoo to now having more than I can count. The relationship I have to my ink today is completely different to back then. I saved up for ages. I put a great amount of attention into what I wanted. I felt sick about it for weeks, didn't know how it was going to feel, who I should tell or how I would react to having it. I spent every evening drawing it, every night dreaming about it, and every minute thinking about it.

The day I was inked for the first time was so notable—the stuffy smell of incense in that back-alley shop in Preston, the amicable smile of the bloke with a grey beard, feeling the pricking sensation for the first time. I had built this moment up for so long, that I couldn't fail to remember every detail.

Afterwards, I was constantly parading my tattoo. It was a very personal symbol to me but I was also proud of it and I would buzz off the fact that I was the only person I knew with any ink. I remember showing my family, friends and huddling round the fire with my housemates the next day telling them all about how it felt. They were so impressed. I didn't post it on Facebook—my tattoo had no relationship to the online world.

Fast forward eight years and I'm sitting in a coffee shop after my second appointment in a month. I've got a couple of pieces of on-going work, and the pre-ink routine consists of me texting my tattoo artist to say, 'you free on Thursday?' Now, I see tattoo art in a completely different way. I let my artist take the lead on where they think it would work best on my body. I don't take anyone with me and don't normally tell that many people I'm going. I value how something looks over what it means.

All this thinking had been sparked by a colleague at work who was getting a quote tattoo on her arm. She was buzzing about it daily, drew it on her body various times before her appointment and was as giddy as a kid at Christmas. As we get bigger, better and more frequent tattoos, do we lose that first-time excitement? Do we ever get it back?

One of the other things I found in my childhood home attic this weekend was folders of



Szymon Gdowicz



BECCY RIMMER
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I WOULD BUZZ OFF THE FACT THAT I WAS THE ONLY PERSON I KNEW WITH ANY INK

poetry, written by me, from the age of about 14. Inspecting them, it's clear that (like most teenagers) I was searching for meaning, *in everything*.

I guess this is why I started to get inked—as my brain became an analytical machine that would never switch off, the process of getting the mental vomit out and onto my skin, definitely helped.

Those early tattoo experiences will always remain an important part of my own self-discovery, my desire to ask questions and my attempt to control my own destiny. But I think as you grow up, your eyes open to the limitless unanswerable questions around us everyday, you don't have to search so hard for them.

Before, I wanted to be in the driving seat of my tattoo decisions, in order to manifest whatever philosophical thoughts that would arise. But now, there's something quite nice about sitting back and letting the world make decisions around you. ▣



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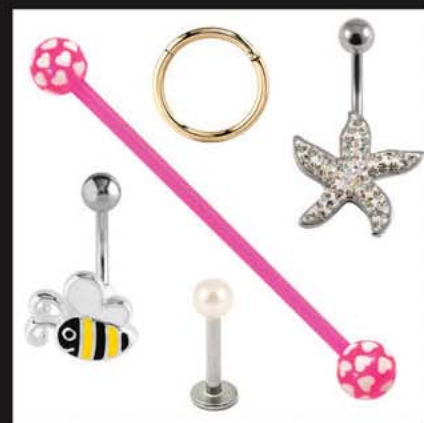
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